Conductors for Change: A Framework of Conductor Competencies for Supporting Adolescent Male Choral Singers

Brian Murphy

Dissertation submitted to the University of Dublin in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree Doctor in Music Performance

Royal Irish Academy of Music

Supervisor: Professor Denise Neary

May 2026

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor in Music Performance, is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed:

ID No.: 19337641

Date: 06/05/2026

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Denise Neary, for her guidance throughout the doctoral programme. I am particularly grateful for her assistance in facilitating the lecture recital and for her role in overseeing the dissertation process. I also wish to acknowledge Deborah Kelleher for her generosity and flexibility in facilitating my choral conducting examinations and for providing invaluable practical support throughout. I would also like to thank my choral conducting teacher, Blánaid Murphy, for her guidance and expertise in preparing for my recitals. Her teaching and musical expertise were instrumental in the development of my conducting practice throughout the programme.

I am grateful to the staff of Holy Child Secondary School, especially Caroline O'Brien and Nickola Dempsey, for their understanding, encouragement and accommodation of my teaching timetable throughout this period. Their support made it possible to balance professional responsibilities alongside the demands of doctoral research. I am deeply appreciative of their positivity and flexibility during this time.

My sincere thanks are extended to the choral conductors who participated in this study. Their openness, experience and insights were invaluable and added considerable depth and richness to the research. I would also like to thank the singers who performed in my recitals. Their commitment, musicianship and engagement is greatly appreciated.

I wish to acknowledge the support of my family, in particular my parents, Peter and Angela Murphy, and my parents-in-law, Paul and Maureen Callaghan, for their constant encouragement and help throughout this journey. I am especially grateful for their support during the final months of the doctorate and for helping to care for our daughter Hannah Mae, which made the completion of this work possible.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank my wife, Lynsey Callaghan. She has been my greatest source of inspiration and support throughout the past four years. Her patience, belief in me and unwavering encouragement sustained me through every challenge of this journey. This doctorate would not have been possible without her and I am deeply grateful for everything she has given along the way.

Table of Contents

Declaration i
Acknowledgements ii
Table of Contents iii
List of Tables vi

Introduction 1
0.1 Exploring the literature 3
0.2 Creating the framework 14
0.3 Navigating the dissertation 15

Chapter One: The Adolescent Male Choral Experience 17
1.1 Theories and understandings of voice change 18
1.1.1 Early theory and practice 19
1.1.2 Growing scientific knowledge 23
1.1.3 The emergence of vocal classifications 25
1.1.4 Early classification models and pedagogical responses 26
1.1.5 John Cooksey 30
1.1.6 Contemporary perspectives 34
1.2 Social and emotional dimensions of male adolescence 36
1.2.1 Developmental challenges for adolescent boys 37
1.2.2 Adolescent males within the choral context 42
1.3 Bridging understanding and practice 46

Chapter Two: Methodology 47
2.1 Project design 47
2.2 Methods for data collection 49
2.2.1 Analysis of literature: Models and frameworks for conducting 49
2.2.2 Analysis of literature: Conducting adolescent changing voices 50
2.2.3 Survey of the training landscape 50
2.2.4 Interviews 51
2.3 Analysis of the data 55
2.3.1 Analysis of literature and training data 55
2.3.2 Analysis of interview data 55

Chapter Three: Foundations for a New Framework 58
3.1 Models and frameworks for conducting 58
3.1.1 Changing approaches to conducting 58
3.1.2 Conductor competencies 63
3.1.2.1 Musical and technical competencies 63
3.1.2.2 Pedagogical competencies 65
3.1.2.3 Interpersonal competencies 66

3.1.3 Contextual considerations 68
3.2 Conducting adolescent changing voices: Analysis of literature 72
3.2.1 The voice 72
3.2.1.1 Knowing the voice 72
3.2.1.2 Developing the voice 78
3.2.1.3 Placing the voice 83
3.2.2 The music 86
3.2.2.1 Rehearsing 87
3.2.2.2 Repertoire 95
3.2.3 The people 100
3.2.3.1 The role model 100
3.2.3.2 The motivator 103
3.2.3.3 The empathiser 105
3.3 Survey of the training landscape 106
3.4 Foundations of an emerging framework 109

Chapter Four: Insights from Practitioners 113
4.1 Description of interview participants 113
4.2 Insights from practitioners 114
4.2.1 Musical and technical competencies 114
4.2.1.1 Understanding the changing voice 115
4.2.1.2 Knowing, selecting and adapting repertoire 117
4.2.1.3 Assigning voice parts 120
4.2.2 Pedagogical competencies 121
4.2.2.1 Teaching about vocal technique and the developing voice 122
4.2.2.2 Planning and structuring rehearsals 124
4.2.2.3 Providing differentiated and individualised teaching 126
4.2.3 Interpersonal competencies 130
4.2.3.1 Building positive relationships 130
4.2.3.2 Communicating with parents and singers 133
4.2.3.3 Providing support and facilitating mentorship 135
4.2.4 Contextual considerations 138
4.2.4.1 School and institutional contexts 139
4.2.4.2 Cultural and social attitudes towards boys singing 140
4.2.4.3 Parental and community engagement 140
4.2.4.4 National policy and conditions 141
4.2.5 The training and preparation of conductors 142

Chapter Five: A Framework of Conductor Competencies for Supporting Adolescent Male Choral Singers **145**
5.1 The framework 145
5.1.1 An overview 147
5.1.2 Musical and technical competencies 147
5.1.3 Pedagogical competencies 151
5.1.4 Interpersonal competencies 156

Conclusion **162**

Bibliography **166**

Appendices
Appendix A: Participant information leaflet 177
Appendix B: Consent form 179
Appendix C: List of indicative topics 181
Appendix D: Interview transcript – Andrew 182
Appendix E: Interview transcript – Brenda 210
Appendix F: Interview transcript – Colin 231
Appendix G: Interview transcript – David 257
Appendix H: Interview transcript – Eoin 284
Appendix I: Interview transcript – Fiona 312
Appendix J: Interview transcript – Geraldine 325
Appendix K: Interview transcript – Harry 347
Appendix L: Interview transcript – Ian 371
Appendix M: Interview transcript – Jenna 387
Appendix N: Example of music written for Cambiata 1, Cambiata 2 and Baritone 413
Appendix O: Example of music written for Tenor 1, Tenor 2 and Baritone 414

List of Tables

Table 4.1	Description of the interview participants' relevant professional contexts	112
Table 5.1	An overview of the framework	145
Table 5.2	A detailed description of the musical and technical competencies	145
Table 5.3	A detailed description of the pedagogical competencies	149
Table 5.4	A detailed description of the interpersonal competencies	154

Introduction

The phenomenon of the 'missing male' in non-liturgical choral music programmes is a well-documented topic of concern for conductors in choral contexts worldwide, highlighting the disproportionate rate at which young males discontinue choral singing during puberty.[1] The effects of this drop-off rate can be felt in adult choirs, which often find it more difficult to recruit tenors and basses than sopranos and altos. This trend is not simply a matter of numbers; it reflects deeper developmental, pedagogical and cultural factors that shape boys' engagement with singing. Central to this issue is the experience of voice change, which is a complex period of physiological and psychosocial transformation that can be both exciting and unsettling. During this time, boys negotiate new musical identities while encountering vulnerability, uncertainty and the risk of disengagement. How conductors respond during this time can influence not only the trajectory of individual singers' musical development but also the broader culture of youth choral practice and the future of adult choral singing. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges facing conductors of youth choirs today is how to best support and encourage their young male singers as they experience puberty.

In my own professional experience, it has become increasingly clear that conventional approaches to conducting and pedagogy do not always meet the specific needs of boys undergoing voice change. Practices that are well intentioned can sometimes contribute inadvertently to disengagement, whether through insufficient attention to vocal health,

[1] Janice Killian, John B. Wayman and Patrick M. Antinone, 'Choral Directors' Self Report of Accommodations Made for Boys' Changing Voices: A Twenty Year Replication', *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 9 (2001), 22; Marie van Gend, Philip Matthias, Nathan Scott and Christopher Allan, 'Australian Adolescent Voices: Rethinking the Choir', paper presented at the Australian Society for Music Education 21st Annual Conference, Melbourne, 13–15 July 2017.

unrealistic expectations or a lack of individualisation. These challenges are compounded by the demands of adolescence itself, including competing commitments to sports, academic pressures and social influences. More recently, the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have amplified these difficulties. I have observed that boys have been slower to return to regular singing than their female peers, underscoring the fragility of engagement in this group and highlighting the need for careful reflection on how practice can encourage sustained participation. These observations form the rationale for this research project. Male adolescents are particularly vulnerable during voice change and supporting them effectively requires conductors to possess a combination of specific knowledge and skills. While there is a growing body of research on adolescent vocal development and choral pedagogy, much of it remains fragmented or oriented toward general choir practice, leaving limited guidance specifically tailored to the male cambiata, or changing, stage. Drawing on my own experience as a choral conductor working within regional organisations such as Dublin Youth Choir and national organisations such as the Irish Youth Choir and Sing Ireland, I am committed to examining these issues critically and exploring how to enhance the training and practice of conductors in order to influence culture, nurture singers and improve the sustainability of boys' participation in choral music in Ireland.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to develop the first comprehensive, research- and practice-informed framework that articulates the competencies that conductors need to develop to support adolescent males effectively during voice change. I intend for this framework to serve not only as a guide for my own practice, but also as a resource for other conductors seeking to improve their practice. Ultimately, this study seeks to make a meaningful contribution to choral practice. By synthesising evidence from literature,

professional training programmes and interviews with experienced conductors who work in Ireland and Northern Ireland, the framework offers a systematic, research-informed, contextual approach to professional development and pedagogical training. In this way, it seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, providing concrete guidance that can influence both individual conductors and broader educational structures. At the heart of the study is an exploration of the knowledge, behaviours and skills that enable conductors to navigate the challenges of adolescent voice change successfully. The study foregrounds practice as central to research, recognising that professional expertise is critical in shaping effective approaches. By integrating perspectives from both literature and lived experiences, the study addresses the question of what conductors need to be able to do to support boys to continue singing, develop musically and sustain engagement through adolescence.

0.1 Exploring the literature

The literature relevant to this study can be broadly understood in two interconnected strands. The first comprises competency models and frameworks that articulate the knowledge, skills and attributes considered essential for choral conductors generally. These sources provide established benchmarks for professional practice, identifying core competencies that underpin effective leadership in choral contexts. The second strand comprises research focused specifically on adolescent male singers undergoing voice change, encompassing both physiological and psychosocial dimensions, as well as pedagogical strategies for supporting young singers through this critical developmental period. While each body of literature is substantial and important in its own right, they have not been formally integrated. As a result, competency frameworks do not account explicitly for the unique challenges of conducting adolescents during voice change and

the literature on adolescent vocal development and choral practice has not been translated into a structured set of conductor competencies. By synthesising these two strands, this study seeks to bridge this gap, establishing a coherent, research- and practice-informed framework that connects a theoretical understanding of adolescent voice change with professional standards of choral conducting.

A broad survey of literature on choral conducting and conductor education reveals a rich range of approaches, competencies and contextual considerations that have been identified as essential for effective practice. Traditional perspectives such as the historical maestro figure highlight the longstanding emphasis on personality, authority and intuitive skill. More contemporary leadership-oriented frameworks, however, foreground adaptive, collaborative and relational aspects of conducting. For example, Hilary Apfelstadt's behavioural, situational and transformational perspectives alongside Susan and Scott Armstrong's principles of transformational leadership, highlight the importance of flexible, responsive leadership in choral contexts.[2] Similarly, practitioner-focused models, such as Ramona Wis's work, provide insight into transformational leadership from the perspective of the lived experiences of a practitioner.[3] Other models articulate competencies more systematically. Alan Gumm's six conducting functions and Colin Durrant's 'Super-model Choral Conductor' specify the skills, knowledge and behaviours considered central to effective conducting.[4] Maria Varvarigou's six-parameter

[2] Hilary Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', *Choral Journal*, 37 (1997), 23; Susan Armstrong and Scott Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', *Music Educators Journal*, 82 (1996), 22–25.
[3] Ramona Wis, *The Conductor as Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2007).
[4] Alan Gumm, 'Six Functions of Conducting: A New Foundation for Music Educators', *Music Educators Journal*, 99 (2012), 43–49; Alan Gumm, 'Music Conducting Functions: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of Theory and Survey Validity', *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain*, 28 (2018), 189–200; Alan Gumm, 'The Development of a Model and Assessment Instrument of Choral Music Teaching Styles', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 41 (1993), 181–199; Colin Durrant, 'Towards a Model of Effective Choral Conducting: Implications for Music Education, Musical Communication and Curriculum

pedagogical model and Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad's three-layer model, integrate socio-cultural, contextual and learner-focused considerations into conductor preparation.[5] These frameworks collectively offer a foundation for understanding the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for general choral leadership. Yet while these models provide valuable guidance, they rarely address the specific challenges of conducting adolescent male singers during voice change. This gap highlights an opportunity to provide an outline of clearly defined, measurable competencies for conductors working in specialised educational contexts, such as supporting adolescent boys.

Complementing the literature on general conductor competencies is a body of work focused specifically on adolescent male singers and the pedagogical considerations associated with voice change. This literature encompasses academic research on vocal development and psychosocial factors, as well as practitioner guides, pedagogical reflections and practical strategies used to support young singers in choral contexts. Several authors have contributed to this field, with some focusing on physiological development and vocal health, others examining engagement, motivation and psychosocial considerations and still others providing guidance on rehearsal planning, repertoire selection and mentoring during the cambiata stage. Together, these sources map the landscape of knowledge and concern in the field, including addressing rehearsal

Development' (PhD dissertation, Roehampton Institute London, 1996); Colin Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003), 100–102.

[5] Maria Varvarigou, 'Modelling Effective Choral Conducting Education Through an Exploration of Example Teaching and Learning in England' (PhD dissertation, University of London, Institute of Education, 2009), 66–71; Maria Varvarigou and Colin Durrant, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors: A Suggested Framework', *British Journal of Music Education*, 28 (2011), 325–338; Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences: Perceptions and Priorities', *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43 (2021), 7–8; See also Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad, 'The Construction of Leadership Practice: Making Sense of Leader Competencies', *Leadership*, 17 (2021), 560–585.

approaches, repertoire selection, vocal health and the relational and ethical responsibilities of conductors working with boys during this transitional stage.

Martin Ashley's contribution to the literature on voice change has been substantial.[6] His work occupies a significant position in the field of adolescent male singing, combining research on vocal development with practical pedagogical guidance for conductors and educators. He, like many others, challenges traditional notions of the 'breaking' voice, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the cambiata period and the gradual nature of vocal change.[7] Through his substantial output, he highlights how entrenched beliefs about voice change persist in school and choir settings, often resulting in practices that fail to support boys effectively during this critical developmental stage.[8] His writing addresses both the physiological and practical dimensions of voice use, examining how adolescent boys place and manage their voices in ensemble contexts and how factors such as pitch accuracy vary with age and development.[9] Beyond the mechanics of singing, Ashley emphasises the social and psychological aspects of adolescent vocal development, exploring how boys' perceptions of their own changing voices influence engagement, identity and motivation, and how adult conductors and educators can foster positive experiences.[10]

---

[6] For a comprehensive overview of Martin Ashley's output, see his website < https://www.martin-ashley.com/blank-1> [accessed 3 June 2024].
[7] Martin Ashley, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum? The Impact of Research on UK School Choral Practice with Boys', *British Journal of Music Education*, 30 (2013), 311–327.
[8] Martin Ashley, 'The Angel Enigma: Experienced Boy Singers' Perceptual Judgements of Changing Voices', *Music Education Research*, 13 (2011), 343–354; Martin Ashley, 'Trends in Young Male Puberty and the Changing Voice: New Dilemmas for Choir Directors', *Choral Journal*, 62 (2021), 61– 64; Martin Ashley, 'The English Choral Tradition and the Secular Trend in Boys' Pubertal Timing', *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 4 (2013), 4–27.
[9] Martin Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2014); Martin Ashley, *Singing in the Lower Secondary School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Martin Ashley, *How High Should Boys Sing?: Gender, Authenticity and Credibility in the Young Male Voice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).
[10] Martin Ashley, 'What Voices have Emerged? Lessons on Boys' Vocal Dispositions and Choral Tone from a New Choral Leaflet Series', *Music Education Research*, 21 (2019), 135–149.

In addition to theoretical and observational insights, Ashley has contributed practical pedagogical resources, including repertoire and guidance specifically designed for boys in the cambiata stage.[11] These materials, alongside his broader research and reflections, demonstrate a commitment to bridging empirical study and real-world practice. Overall, Ashley's work offers both a detailed understanding of adolescent male vocal development and concrete strategies for conductors seeking to support boys effectively through the transitional period of voice change.

While Ashley combines research on adolescent vocal development with pedagogical guidance, Patrick Freer focuses more explicitly on practical strategies for retaining and supporting adolescent male singers in choral contexts during voice change.[12] Freer's work emphasises evidence-informed approaches to rehearsal practice and draws attention to the factors that contribute to boys disengaging from choirs: 'the allure of sports programs, block scheduling, the scheduling of after-school rehearsals, budget cuts, the influence of popular culture'.[13] He highlights the importance of structuring rehearsals, selecting repertoire thoughtfully and providing pedagogical interventions that accommodate both the physiological and social needs of boys in this age group.[14] He provides practical strategies for rehearsal design, warm-ups and vocal technique tailored to the developmental needs of changing voices.[15] He also addresses vocal health, drawing on

[11] Martin Ashley is the series editor for Oxford University Press 'Emerging Voices' series, which provides a selection of engaging short pieces tailored specifically to the needs of changing or 'cambiata' male voices.
[12] For a list of Patrick Freer's output up to 2018, see his profile on ResearchGate <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patrick-Freer> [accessed 3 June 2024].
[13] Patrick Freer, 'Between Research and Practice: How Choral Music Loses Boys in the "Middle"', *Music Educators Journal*, 94 (2007), 28–34; Patrick Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys from Middle School to High School Choral Music', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 28.
[14] Patrick Freer, 'Educational Research: Practical Implications for the Rehearsal', *Choral Journal*, 33 (1992), 29–34.
[15] Patrick Freer, 'Adapt, Build, and Challenge: Three Keys to Effective Choral Rehearsals for Young Adolescents', *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 48–55; Patrick Freer, 'Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 95 (2009), 57–62.

the experiences of singers who have undergone puberty to inform safe and effective practices.[16] Across his work, Freer engages critically with the literature and synthesises current knowledge, ensuring that his recommendations for conductors are grounded in both research and the realities of everyday choral practice.[17] Overall, Freer's contributions emphasise the practical application of research to rehearsal, retention and voice management, providing conductors with strategies to navigate the physiological, social and educational challenges of working with adolescent male singers.

Beyond Ashley and Freer, several other scholars and practitioners have contributed significantly to the study and pedagogy of adolescent male singers, each bringing distinct emphases that together map the broader landscape of concern and knowledge in this field. These contributions can be broadly grouped into three interrelated areas: vocal development, rehearsal strategies and pedagogical practice and social considerations.

In the area of technical vocal development, writers combine empirical observation with practical guidance, exploring the mechanics of vocal change, voice classification and safe singing practices. Contemporary writers build on the invaluable work of twentieth-century researchers such as Duncan McKenzie, Irvin Cooper, Frederick Swanson and John Cooksey.[18] Their texts are invaluable for choral conductors, vocal pedagogues and,

[16] Patrick Freer, 'Vocal Health During the Voice Change: Recollections and Recommendations of Collegiate Male Choral Singers', *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 181 (2022), 181–196.
[17] Patrick Freer, 'Foundation of the Boy's Expanding Voice: A Response to Henry Leck', *Choral Journal*, 50 (2010), 33; Patrick Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males: An Updated Look at "What Do We Know Now?"', *Choral Journal*, 63 (2022), 43.
[18] Duncan McKenzie, *Training the Boy's Changing Voice* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1956); Irvin Cooper, 'The Junior High School Choral Problem', *Music Educators Journal*, 37, (1950), 20–21; Irvin Cooper and Karl O. Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1956); Frederick Swanson, 'Changing Voices: Don't Leave Out the Boys', *Music Educators Journal*, 40 (1984), 47–50; Frederick Swanson, *Music Teaching in the Junior High and Middle School* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973); Frederick Swanson, *The Male Singing Voice Ages Eight to Eighteen* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Igram Press, 1977); Frederick Swanson,

in some cases, for the young singers themselves and they provide a solid foundation for the field. Building on their work, Leon Thurman provides a clear overview of the physiological changes experienced by adolescent boys and outlines the technical skills required to develop them effectively.[19] Elizabeth C. Willis and Dianna T. Kenny offer valuable information about the appearance of phonation gaps and the impact of voice change on pitch accuracy in adolescent boys.[20] Henry Leck focuses on understanding the adolescent male voice from both a biological and musical perspective, with particular emphasis on the importance of developing falsetto in young male singers.[21] Falsetto is also the topic of the investigation by Janice Killian and John Wayman who consider the development of falsetto singing in young males.[22] Jenevora Williams similarly provides practitioner-oriented insights into teaching singing to children and adolescents, addressing both vocal technique and developmental considerations.[23] Christopher Bell, through the National Youth Choir of Scotland, produced a pamphlet aimed at providing young singers, their parents and conductors with practical knowledge and advice during voice change, including a visual mapping of the changing voice.[24] Collectively, these

'The Proper Care and Feeding of Changing Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (1961), 63–66; Frederick Swanson, 'When Voices Change: An Experiment in Junior High School Music', *Music Educators Journal*, 46 (1960), 50–56; John Cooksey, 'The Development of a Contemporary, Eclectic Theory for the Training and Cultivation of the Junior High School Male Changing Voice: Part II: Scientific and Empirical Findings; Some Tentative Solutions', *Choral Journal*, 18 (1977), 5–16; John Cooksey, 'Voice Transformation in Male Adolescents', in Leon Thurman and Graham Welch (eds), *Bodymind and Voice: Foundations of Voice Education* (Collegeville, Minneapolis: The VoiceCare Network, 2000), 718–738; John Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2nd edn, 1999).

[19] Leon Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices: What Do We Know Now?', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 8–21.

[20] Elizabeth C. Willis and Dianna T. Kenny, 'Effect of Voice Change on Singing Pitch Accuracy in Young Male Singers', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, 2 (2008), 111–119.

[21] Henry Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice: Take The High Road', *Choral Journal*, 49 (2009), 49–60.

[22] Janice Killian and John B. Wayman, 'A Descriptive Study of Vocal Maturation Among Male Adolescent Vocalists and Instrumentalists', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 58 (2010), 5–19.

[23] Jenevora Williams, *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2nd edn, 2018); Jenevora Williams, Graham Welch and David M. Howard, 'Which Sung Pitch Range is Best for Boys during Voice Change?', *Journal of Voice*, 35 (2021), 581–588.

[24] Christopher Bell, *My Voice is Changing: Useful Information for Boys, Choir Directors, and Parents Before and During Voice Changes* (Glasgow: National Youth Choir of Scotland, 2001).

authors provide an insight into the foundational knowledge required to support healthy vocal development during the cambiata stage.

A second group emphasises rehearsal strategies, pedagogy and practical implementation. Their outputs are primarily aimed towards practitioners, offering actionable strategies grounded in classroom and ensemble experience rather than formal empirical research. This body of work addresses the day-to-day realities faced by conductors, ensuring that pedagogical theory is translated into sustainable and effective practice. Rollo Dilworth offers detailed, practice-based guidance for conductors, including approaches to structuring rehearsals, differentiating instruction and selecting age-appropriate repertoire.[25] Freer's work also intersects with this group, particularly through his focus on rehearsal management and engagement.[26] Similarly, Christopher and Donna White provide practical rehearsal suggestions, including warm-up strategies, the use of male role models and approaches to reducing self-consciousness among boys.[27] Several authors within this grouping write from their experience working in school contexts: Judy Bowers presents a sequenced approach to establishing a successful middle school choir, outlining key priorities for working with young singers in school contexts, while Joanne Rutkowski offers strategies for developing school choirs, with particular attention to strategies for working with changing voices and voice placement within ensembles.[28] Other writers focus on repertoire selection: Emily Crocker offers guidance on choosing music for

[25] Rollo Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices in the Choral Rehearsal: A Survey of Research-Based Strategies', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 22–33.
[26] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 49.
[27] Christopher D. White and Donna K. White, 'Commonsense Training for Changing Male Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 87 (2001), 39–53.
[28] Judy Bowers, 'Structuring Successes in Beginning Middle School Choral Ensembles', in Frank Abrahms (ed.), *Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2011), 57–73; Joanne Rutkowski, 'The Junior High School Male Changing Voice', *American Choral Journal*, 22 (1981), 11–15.

middle school choirs, identifying appropriate repertoire for different voicings;[29] Braeden Ayres highlights the available pedagogical choral repertoire for adolescent males;[30] and Drew Collins shows how repertoire can be used as a pedagogical tool for changing voices, addressing issues such as programme selection, optimal vowels for vocalising, the teacher as a vocal model, rehearsal priorities and learning environments.[31] Others contribute to this field by producing repertoire that is informed by deep knowledge of the changing voice in the choral context, which is invaluable for practitioners: Don Collins, founder of Cambiata Press, has contributed significantly to the availability of repertoire specifically arranged for boys undergoing voice change, informed by range classifications proposed by writers such as Cooper and Cooksey;[32] and composers including Ian Crawford and Lon Beery have also created music specifically written for changing voices, ensuring that singers at different stages of vocal development have appropriate parts to sing.[33]

Finally, there is a strong and increasing output exploring the social, emotional and identity-related challenges that boys encounter during voice change. Bridget Sweet and Dilworth examine how conductors can support engagement, motivation and confidence, emphasising the relational and ethical responsibilities inherent in working with

[29] Emily Crocker, 'Choosing Music for Middle School Choirs', *Music Educators Journal*, 86 (2000), 33–37.
[30] Braeden T. Ayres, 'Pedagogical Choral Repertoire for Early Adolescent Males in the United States: A Descriptive Study' (PhD dissertation, Florida State University College of Music, 2020).
[31] Drew Collins, 'Using Repertoire to Teach Vocal Pedagogy in All-Male Changing Voice Choirs', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 35–41.
[32] Don Collins, 'The Cambiata Concept: More than Just about Changing Voices', *Choral Journal*, 23 (1982), 5; Don Collins, 'Preferred Practices in Teaching Boys Whose Voices are Changing', *American Choral Directors Association*, 47 (2006), 119–121; Don Collins, *Teaching Choral Music* (London: Pearson, 2nd ed, 1999.
[33] Ian Crawford, *Changing Voices: Songs for Boys* (London: Novello, 2017); Lon Beery, *The Cambiata Collection: Range-ready Repertoire for Developing TTB Choirs* (Van Nuys, California: Alfred, 2020). For examples of their scores arranged specifically for changing voices, see Appendix N and Appendix O, 413–414.

adolescents.[34] Also focused on motivation, Rick Stamer outlines effective strategies for use in choral rehearsals with young singers, including ways to create a nurturing environment, provide constructive feedback, select meaningful repertoire and present appropriately challenging tasks.[35] Mishaal Surti provides recommendations for running a choral programme that includes young male singers while also offering insight into boys' perceptions of their own voice change and showing how these can aid the conductor in their practice.[36] Killian is also concerned with how young singers perceive voice change in a study that compares adolescents' views with those of adult men who had already experienced voice change, confirming the importance of incorporating the boys' experiences into the design of choral programmes.[37] Craig and Maria Denison discuss how directors and teachers can create environments and experiences that foster deep, positive meaning for singers.[38] They emphasise an understanding of the physical changes that take place during voice change, supporting healthy psychological and social development, and providing musical experiences that strengthen singers' identities. These contributions complement the technical and rehearsal-focused literature by foregrounding the human dimension of choral pedagogy, acknowledging that musical outcomes are closely linked to emotional and social support. Anita Collins' boy's music ecosystem is a model that can be used to develop successful teaching practices when working with adolescent boys in a variety of music contexts, highlighting the primary motivations for adolescent boys' participation in music-making and the key factors that likely influence

[34] Bridget Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box: Adolescent Voice Change in Music Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 22–33.
[35] Rick A. Stamer, 'Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal', *Music Educators Journal*, 85 (1999), 26–29.
[36] Mishall Surti, 'Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom', *Canadian Music Educator*, 50 (2008), 38–40.
[37] Janice Killian, 'Perceptions of the Voice-Change Process: Male Adult versus Adolescent Musicians and Non-Musicians', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 45 (1997), 521–535.
[38] Craig Denison and Maria Denison, 'Uncovering Meaning and Identity through Voice Change', *Choral Journal*, 59 (2019), 28–37.

them staying or leaving music education programmes.[39] Specifically concerned with choral settings, Anthony Young focuses on masculinity, classroom environment and learning styles,[40] while Scott Harrison addresses stereotypes associated with boys' participation in singing and offers strategies for creating more supportive rehearsal environments.[41] Recognising the challenge of boys' participation, Bryan Rante's doctoral dissertation explores recruitment and retention strategies for boys in middle school choirs.[42] Connecting to broader issues in education, Frank Abrahams advocates for the application of critical pedagogy in middle school music education, while Ryan Fisher offers a self-efficacy scale for adolescent males in singing contexts.[43]

The aforementioned authors map a broad field of concern encompassing the technical development of the changing voice, practical strategies for effective rehearsal and pedagogy and the social factors influencing boys' continued participation in choral music. While their work varies in focus and approach, a consistent theme is the need for conductors to integrate knowledge across these areas in order to support adolescent male singers effectively. While this body of work provides valuable insights, it has not yet been systematically analysed and developed into a framework. Further, there is little

[39] Anita Collins, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', in Scott Harrison (ed.), *Male Voices: Stories of Boys Learning through Making Music* (Camberwell: ACER Press, 2009), 33–46; Anita Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer 2012), 95–107.
[40] Anthony Young, 'The Adolescent Male Changing Voice: Physiological, Psychological and Practical Considerations for Classroom Music Teachers', *Australian Kodaly Journal* (2012), 37–45.
[41] Scott Harrison, 'A Perennial Problem in Gendered Participation in Music: What's Happening to the Boys?', *British Journal of Music Education*, 24 (2007), 267–280; Scott Harrison, 'Engaging Boys, Overcoming Stereotypes: Another Look at the Missing Males in Vocal Programs', *Choral Journal*, 45 (2004), 24–29.
[42] Bryan Rante, 'Male Recruitment Strategies for Middle School Chorus' (DME dissertation, Liberty University School of Music, 2023).
[43] Frank Abrahams, 'Changing Voices – Voices of Change: Young Men in Middle School Choirs', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 79–92; Ryan A. Fisher, 'The Impacts of the Voice Change, Grade Level, and Experience on the Singing Self Efficacy of Emerging Adolescent Males', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62 (2014), 277–290.

research focused specifically on adolescent male voice change in Ireland. One notable exception is Freer, who produced a study that incorporated interviews with adolescent boys from multiple countries, including Ireland, shedding light on their experiences of voice change and school choral participation.[44] Moreover, the perspectives of practitioners in Ireland have also yet to be incorporated in the literature in any substantial way. This research addresses these gaps, providing a framework that synthesises existing writings on adolescent male voice transition while directly incorporating the voices of practitioners who work regularly in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

0.2 Creating the framework

The study aimed to develop a research- and practice-informed framework of competencies for choral conductors working with adolescent males during voice change to address a gap in existing conductor training and professional development. The framework was constructed by integrating three sources of evidence: a synthesis of the literature, a review of current training provision and semi-structured interviews with experienced conductors. The literature review examined both general choral conducting models and research specific to adolescent male voice change, identifying essential knowledge, skills and attributes. The survey of the training provision mapped existing professional development opportunities, highlighting the significant gap that exists in preparing conductors for working with cambiata singers. Interviews with ten conductors who work with young people in Ireland and Northern Ireland provided rich, behaviour-focused insights into real-world practices, challenges and effective strategies. Data from these sources were analysed systematically. Literature and data relating to training

[44] Patrick Freer, 'Perspectives of European Boys about Their Voice Change and School Choral Singing: Developing the Possible Selves of Adolescent Male Singers', *British Journal of Music Education*, 32 (2015), 87–106.

opportunities were coded deductively to identify key competency areas, while interview transcripts were coded both deductively and inductively to capture additional, context-specific behaviours and insights. Thematic analysis allowed recurring patterns to be organised into competency domains, ensuring alignment with existing frameworks while remaining specific to the needs of adolescent male singers. Triangulation of evidence from research, training and practice ensured that the resulting framework is both informed by evidence and grounded in professional experience. The outcome is a comprehensive and actionable set of competencies that reflects current research, the specific challenges associated with supporting adolescent male singers and professional realities in the Irish context.

0.3 Navigating the dissertation

This dissertation is organised into five main chapters, each contributing to the development of a framework of competencies for choral conductors working with adolescent male singers. Chapter One examines the adolescent male choral experience, considering both physiological and psychosocial dimensions and situating these within historical and contemporary pedagogical issues and practices. Chapter Two outlines the methodology, detailing the design of the study, data-collection methods and the analytic processes used to synthesise the findings into the framework. Chapter Three presents the foundations for the new framework, integrating insights from two valuable bodies of literature and the current training landscape to establish a literature-informed outline of the knowledge, skills and contextual considerations relevant to conducting adolescent changing voices. Chapter Four draws on practitioner interviews, highlighting the behaviours identified and strategies utilised in professional practice. Chapter Five consolidates the findings from Chapters Three and Four into a coherent framework of

conductor competencies. This study concludes with a discussion on the implications of the framework for professional development and future research, considers the ongoing connection between research and practice and offers suggestions for further development of the framework.

Chapter One

The Adolescent Male Choral Experience

A deep understanding of the anatomical, social, emotional and psychological processes surrounding this significant change during puberty is often lacking in choral practitioners. This chapter addresses that gap by establishing the foundational knowledge that informs the framework developed later in this dissertation. Rather than just offering a general account of puberty or voice change, the chapter examines the adolescent male choral experience through the lens of professional practice, clarifying the forms of knowledge and awareness that conductors require in order to respond effectively during this period of transition. In doing so, it situates voice change as a central pedagogical concern and prepares the ground for articulating the competencies necessary to support adolescent male singers appropriately.

The chapter begins by examining the anatomical changes that occur during voice change in adolescent boys, accounting for historical perspectives, illustrating how the ongoing debate has changed and evolved over time and charting the evolution of scientific knowledge surrounding the physiological processes. It considers how different approaches to supporting young singers and systems for classifying changing voices have emerged, highlighting the pedagogical implications for conductors. Following this, the chapter explores other physical, social, emotional and psychological processes associated with puberty in adolescent boys, identifying the factors that conductors must recognise and respond to in order to engage, support and sustain their singers effectively. Together, these sections establish a comprehensive view of the adolescent male choral experience,

laying the groundwork for later chapters that build the framework at the centre of this research project.

1.1 Theories and understandings of voice change

Throughout history, the onset of adolescence and the associated transformation of the male voice have presented both musical and pedagogical challenges, prompting ongoing debate about the nature of voice change and how boys should be supported in choral contexts. For much of this history, understandings of voice change were shaped by tradition, anecdotal observations and the authority of master teachers, resulting in pedagogical practices that emphasised withdrawal from choirs during puberty. From the mid-twentieth century onwards, however, research emerging from fields outside of music performance (including medicine, physiology and developmental psychology) has increasingly informed musical discourse, providing new insights into the anatomical processes underpinning adolescent voice change. Within historical overviews of approaches to adolescent voice change, these contrasting perspectives are commonly conceptualised as two broad theoretical positions: the historically dominant 'break theory' and the more recent 'change theory'.[1] The emergence of 'change theory' in the twentieth century challenged long-established assumptions and encouraged the emergence of research-informed vocal pedagogies that prioritise the continuity of singing and adapt supports to the needs of the developing voices.[2] Many vocal practitioners now recognise voice change as a gradual process and advocate for the continued participation of boys in singing activities. However, tradition within classical music remains strong and not all conductors have abandoned inherited practices in favour of research-informed

[1] Ryan A. Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice: An Historical Overview', *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 31 (2009).
[2] Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 41.

practices. In some cases, ideas aligned with the break theory continue to be perpetuated, often implicitly, resulting in an uneven approach among choral conductors. Consequently, inherited traditions frequently continue to shape decisions regarding participation, voice classification and repertoire.

This first half of the chapter examines the historical emergence of these two theoretical positions in detail, beginning with early conceptions of voice 'break' and progressing through the development of scientific and pedagogical models that underpin contemporary understandings of adolescent voice change. In doing so, it establishes the historical context necessary for understanding current choral practices and for developing a framework through which conductors can more effectively support boys during this period of vocal transition.

1.1.1 Early theory and practice

Young male singers have been a part of the Christian sacred music tradition since the earliest days of choral music in Europe. Early documentary evidence, such as the sixth-century Rule of Benedict, frequently mentions the training and regulation of boys' singing within monastic communities.[3] In churches and cathedrals, boys often received specialist training in choir schools, where they were a crucial part of the music-making.[4] For much of these fifteen centuries, choral pedagogues understood adolescent male voice change as a rupture rather than a gradual developmental process. This perspective, later termed the 'break theory', framed puberty as a period of vocal instability during which

[3] Susan Boynton and Eric Rice, *Young Choristers, 650-1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 3.
[4] For a detailed description of the role of the young in sacred musical culture before 1700, see Boynton and Rice, *Young Choristers, 650-1700*. For an overview of the development of choirs and choir schools, see J. Pierce Anthony, 'Choirs and Choir Schools in the History of Church Music' (MA dissertation, Boston University, 1956).

singing was believed to pose a significant risk of permanent damage.[5] Within English and European cathedral and monastic traditions, this belief was institutionalised through established pedagogical practices; when a boy's voice was perceived to have 'broken', it was common practice for him to stop singing entirely and he was usually dismissed from his choir duties.[6] Evidence suggests that such dismissal was often formalised in cathedral schools, with *defectus vocis* listed as the reason for dismissal.[7]

In some contexts, boys were re-assigned to non-vocal tasks and later returned to the choir as tenors or basses.[8] However, many stopped singing permanently and pursued other professions, likely 'discouraged and disappointed' by their experience.[9] For some, this perceived incompatibility between adolescence and choral singing also shaped more extreme interventions. In parts of Europe, most notably Italy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, castration was employed to prevent vocal change altogether and preserve the treble voice.[10] Although this practice eventually declined, its prevalence highlights the extent to which the changing male voice was regarded as fundamentally problematic within established choral practices.

---

[5] Nicholas A. Dolan, 'The Life and Legacy of Duncan McKenzie (1885–1961): A Champion of Twentieth-Century Music Pedagogy', *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* (2025), 2.
[6] Frederick J. Swanson, *Music Teaching in the Junior High and Middle School* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973), 188; Martin Ashley, 'The Angel Enigma: Experienced Boy Singers' Perceptual Judgements of Changing Voices', *Music Education Research*, 13 (2011), 343–354; Martin Ashley, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum? The Impact of Research on UK School Choral Practice with Boys', *British Journal of Music Education*, 30 (2013), 311–327; Martin Ashley, 'The English Choral Tradition and the Secular Trend in Boys' Pubertal Timing', *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 4 (2013), 4–27.
[7] Sandrine Dumont, 'Choirboys and Vicaires at the Maîtrise of Cambrai: A Socio-anthropological Study (1500-1670)', in Susan Boynton and Eric Rice (eds), *Young Choristers, 650-1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 153.
[8] Ibid., 153.
[9] Kendra Kay Friar, 'Changing Voices, Changing Times', *Music Educators Journal*, 86 (1999), 27.
[10] Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 37. For more on the history of castrati, see D. A. Weiss, 'The Pubertal Change of the Human Voice', *Folia Phoniatrica*, 2 (1950), 125–159; Frederick J. Swanson, *The Male Singing Voice Ages 8 to 18* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Laurance Press, 1977); Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon* (London: Souvenir Press, 1998); and John S. Jenkins, 'The Lost Voice: A History of the Castrato', *Journal of Paediatric Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 13 (2000), 1503–1508.

The authority of the break theory was further consolidated during the nineteenth century through the writings of influential vocal pedagogues. Among the most significant was well-respected Italian singing teachers of the nineteenth century Manuel Garcia (1805–1906), whose work exerted considerable influence on vocal instruction across Europe.[11] In his treatise on singing, Garcia warned of the dangers of vocal injury during adolescence, arguing that once a voice's 'freshness and steadiness' were impaired, they could 'never to be restored'.[12] He described the voice during adolescence as 'broken' and advocated for vocal rest during puberty.[13] In *Hints on Singing*, Garcia advised that singers should not sing 'until the change is complete', cautioning that interference during this period could 'ruin the voice forever'.[14] While his recommendation that singers wait until the age of eighteen to return to singing must be understood within the context of later pubertal onset in the nineteenth century, his underlying assumption that the adolescent voice undergoes a disruptive break requiring cessation of singing is clear. Garcia did not acknowledge the sources that informed his understanding of the voice break theory in his books, nor did he indicate where he derived his ideas about total vocal rest. Nevertheless, owing to his importance as a music teacher, his ideas were widely disseminated and became embedded within vocal and choral pedagogy. This helped establish the break theory as the most standard idea about vocal change at that time and Garcia's advocacy of withdrawal from singing as the appropriate response to voice change proliferated through Europe and remains an ideology that many choral conductors still subscribe to today.[15]

[11] Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 38.
[12] Manuel Garcia, *New Treatise on the Art of Singing* (Boston, Massachusetts: Oliver Ditson Company, 1857), 8.
[13] Reginald Hunt, 'Singing for Boys: The Adolescent Voice', *The Musical Times*, 86 (1945), 237.
[14] Manuel Garcia, *Hints on Singing* (London: Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, 1894), 8.
[15] John Cooksey, 'Voice Transformation in Male Adolescents', in Leon Thurman and Graham Welch (eds), *Bodymind and Voice: Foundations of Voice Education* (Collegeville, Minneapolis: The VoiceCare Network, 2000), 719.

Later in the nineteenth century, efforts were made to systematise these beliefs. Emil Behnke (1836–1892), a prominent vocal pedagogue with a strong interest in vocal anatomy and physiology, sought to align vocal teaching with contemporary scientific knowledge.[16] Highly respected by contemporaries such as John Spencer Curwen, he was considered to occupy a position 'halfway between the doctor and the singing master'.[17] His work represented an early attempt to bridge vocal pedagogy and scientific inquiry, although it remained shaped by prevailing pedagogical assumptions. In 1885, Behnke collaborated with Lennox Browne, one of the most important laryngologists of the time, who had written his master's essay on the topic of voice change.[18] They published a study based on questionnaires completed by choirmasters, singing teachers and students regarding their experiences of adolescent voice change.[19] This publication constitutes the first extended commentary devoted specifically to the male child's voice. The majority of respondents believed that it was unsafe for boys to sing while their voices were changing and many reported that continued singing during puberty resulted in vocal injury or deterioration.[20] On the basis of these responses, Behnke and Browne concluded that singing during the period of change was 'injurious and even ruinous', though they acknowledged that not all boys' voices break and those that did not break may continue to sing.[21] While influential, this study relied entirely on subjective testimony rather than physiological evidence. Nonetheless, its findings reinforced existing beliefs, further

[16] Megan Leigh Stapleton, 'The Vocal Pedagogy of the Behnke Family: The Behnke Method' (DMA dissertation, University of North Texas, 2020).
[17] John Spencer Curwen, 'Emil Behnke', *The Musical Herald*, 1 October 1892, 293.
[18] Anon, 'Obituary Notice: Lennox Browne, F.R.C.S.E.', *The Journal of Laryngology, Rhinology and Otology*, 17 (1902), 629–631.
[19] Emil Behnke and Lennox Browne, *The Child's Voice: Its Treatment with Regard to After-Development* (New York: Oliver Ditson Company, 1885).
[20] Behnke and Browne, *The Child's Voice,* 65.
[21] Duncan McKenzie, *Training the Boy's Changing Voice* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1956), 3; Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 39.

legitimising and perpetuating the exclusion of boys from choral singing during adolescence throughout the nineteenth century.[22]

1.1.2 Growing scientific knowledge

Despite the deeply entrenched authority of nineteenth-century beliefs, the turn of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a fundamental shift. Advances in medical science and developmental research began to challenge the assumption that adolescent voice change constituted a singular and dangerous rupture, while emerging studies, such as Frank Shuttleworth's exploration of adolescence, supported the idea that aspects of puberty occur in a more gradual manner than previously thought.[23] Research into adolescent development became increasingly systematic. The most influential framework reinforcing the idea of a gradual change came from paediatrician James Tanner. During the 1960s, he first released his scale of physical development in adolescent males, which divided pubescent boys into five distinct stages of development (G1–G5).[24] Although primarily concerned with genital development, the Tanner Scale provided a widely adopted framework for understanding the gradual and progressive nature of puberty and remains in use today. The scale helped clinicians assess whether physical development was progressing at a typical rate by providing a clinical measure of growth stages rather than focusing on behaviour or psychology. Such models reinforced the view that physiological changes, including those affecting the voice, occur along a continuum rather than as a singular event.

---

[22] Henry J. Wood, *The Gentle Art of Singing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 22; Don L. Collins, *Teaching Choral Music* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2nd edn, 1999), 123.
[23] Frank K. Shuttleworth, 'The Adolescent Period: A Pictorial Atlas', *Society for Research in Child Development*, 14 (1949), 1–69.
[24] James Mourilyan Tanner, *Growth at Adolescence: With a General Consideration of the Effects of Hereditary and Environmental Factors Upon Growth and Maturation from Birth to Maturity* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1962).

As this body of scientific knowledge expanded, choral conductors increasingly questioned the longstanding assumption that boys should be withdrawn from choirs during puberty. The popularity of the 'break theory' and the associated vocal rest during the period of change gradually declined.[25] According to Ryan Fisher, 'the modern theory contended that since the voice changes gradually, a boy may sing throughout that period as long as he is instructed how to properly use his voice'.[26] This shift marked a significant change in choral practice: rather than withdrawing young singers from musical activity during puberty, there was increasing acceptance that continued singing could be accommodated safely.

By the mid-twentieth century, advances in scientific observation and pedagogical reflection had begun to challenge the long-standing assumption that boys' voices 'broke' suddenly during puberty. Increasingly, evidence demonstrated that, in the vast majority of cases, vocal change in adolescent boys is a gradual and highly individual process rather than an abrupt rupture. As boys progress through puberty, the vocal folds lengthen and thicken and the larynx increases in size, resulting in a gradual lowering of pitch over time.[27] The most active period of change typically occurs between approximately twelve and a half and fourteen years of age, when a boy's speaking pitch will usually fall consistently.[28] After puberty, the male larynx will have increased in size by 66%, compared with a growth of around 24% in females.[29] While the larynx of boys and girls is similar in size before puberty, male growth occurs predominantly in an anterior-posterior

[25] Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 40.
[26] Ibid., 39.
[27] Martin Ashley, *How High Should Boys Sing?: Gender, Authenticity and Credibility in the Young Male Voice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 42.
[28] John Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2nd edn, 1999), 12.
[29] Joel C. Kahane, 'A Morphological Study of the Human Prepubertal and Pubertal Larynx', *American Journal of Anatomy*, 151 (1978), 11–19.

(front to back) direction, leading to the formation of the Adam's apple, whereas female growth occurs more vertically.[30]

This physiological reality has significant implications for choral practice. During the period of vocal transition, boys may experience considerable fluctuation in both range and tessitura, often necessitating movement between voice parts multiple times over a relatively short period. While some boys may temporarily retain access to higher registers, others may find these diminishing while lower pitches begin to emerge. By the end of the process, most boys will settle into a lower adult voice, typically categorised as tenor or bass, although individual outcomes vary and a small number may retain throughout adulthood a range more appropriately described as soprano or alto. During this transitional stage, boys are commonly referred to as *cambiata* singers, a term derived from the Italian word meaning 'change' and later adopted to describe boys whose voices are actively in transition.[31]

1.1.3 The emergence of vocal classifications

As awareness of the gradual nature of vocal change increased, so too did the need for systematic approaches to understanding and managing it within choral contexts. Conductors began to recognise that traditional SATB and TTBB voicings often failed to accommodate the fluctuating ranges of adolescent boys, whose vocal capacities could span those typically associated with alto, tenor or even bass voices at different points in the process. Early efforts to accommodate changing voices in choral music were led by

[30] Lynne Gackle, 'The Adolescent Female Voice: Characteristics of Change and Stages of Development', *Choral Journal*, 31 (1991), 17–25.
[31] Though the concept emerged earlier than the use of the term 'cambiata', for an early reference to Cooper's use of the word to describe the change, see Thomas N. Wikstrom, 'Changing Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (1962), 149–151.

Robert McLeod, Reginald Hunt, William Gillies Whittaker, Herbert Wisemann, William Norman Mellalieu and others.[32] There was an increased desire for vocal classification systems that could account for the changing physiological realities of boys' voices and provide practical guidance for repertoire selection, voice placement and rehearsal planning. The emergence of vocal classification represented a critical shift away from earlier pedagogical traditions that either excluded boys from singing during puberty or required them to rest their voices for extended periods. Instead, classification offered a means of keeping boys actively engaged in choral singing by acknowledging variation, flexibility and gradual development as normal aspects of vocal maturation. It provided a conceptual framework through which conductors could respond to change not as a problem to be avoided, but as a developmental process to be understood and supported. This growing emphasis on classification laid the foundation for a series of pedagogical models developed throughout the mid-twentieth century, as educators sought to translate emerging physiological knowledge into workable strategies for choral practice.

1.1.4 Early classification models and pedagogical responses

As conductors increasingly recognised that adolescent voice change was gradual rather than abrupt, the question shifted from whether boys should sing during puberty to how their voices could be organised, supported and used effectively within choral settings. From the mid-twentieth century, a number of educators began to develop classification systems and pedagogical approaches intended to accommodate boys whose voices were in transition.[33] They typically based their findings on their own experiences of working

[32] Robert McLeod (ed.), *A Heritage of Song: A Song Book for Adolescent Boys* (London: J. Curwen and Sons, 1932); Hunt, 'Singing for Boys', 237–238; W. Norman Mellalieu, W. Gilles Whittaker and Herbert Wisemann (eds), *The Clarendon Song Books for Boys with Changing Voices* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935).

[33] Some of the output at this time included: McKenzie, *Training the Boy's Changing Voice*; Irvin Cooper, 'The Junior High School Choral Problem', *Music Educators Journal*, 37 (1950), 20–21; Irvin Cooper and

with adolescent voices and all had in common a desire to engage boys in singing during the process of adolescent vocal change. Their early models represent the first sustained attempts to translate emerging understandings of vocal change into practical choral strategies.

One of the earliest and most influential contributions was Duncan McKenzie's *Training the Boy's Changing Voice* published in 1956. Working primarily in the United States, McKenzie proposed an alto-tenor plan that divided the changing voice into six categories. Mckenzie outlined the vocal stages of his alto-tenor plan as follows: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, Alto, Alto/Tenor, Tenor and Bass.[34] His model was based on the premise that the voice lowers as a whole over time, with the upper register gradually diminishing as the lower register develops.[35] McKenzie established criteria for recognising different stages of vocal change and offered practical techniques for exercising voices safely during this period. Importantly, his work marked a decisive move away from the prevailing practice of resting the voice during puberty and challenged the notion that boys should be excluded from singing during voice change.[36]

Building on similar concerns, Irvin Cooper developed what became known as the 'cambiata concept', a pedagogical and organisational approach designed specifically for junior high school choral programmes.[37] Cooper identified pedagogical misunderstanding and inappropriate repertoire as primary reasons boys disengaged from singing during

---

Karl O. Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1956); Frederick Swanson, 'When Voices Change: An Experiment in Junior High School Music', *Music Educators Journal*, 46 (1960), 50–56; and Frederick Swanson, 'The Proper Care and Feeding of Changing Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (1961), 63–66.

[34] McKenzie, *Training the Boy's Changing Voice*, 30.

[35] Ibid., 27.

[36] Dolan, 'The Life and Legacy of Duncan McKenzie', 19.

[37] Cooper, 'The Junior High School Choral Problem' , 20-21.

voice change.[38] He observed that boys were frequently asked to sing outside their comfortable range and tessitura, leading to vocal cracking, embarrassment and eventual withdrawal from choral participation.[39] He drew attention to the capabilities of boys when they were facilitated to sing in a range of their choosing.[40] Cooper proposed that traditional SATB and TTBB voicings were ill-suited to adolescent male voices and should be replaced with alternative structures that reflected the realities of vocal transition, encouraging music publishers to 'rely on the expressed needs of music educators in selecting manuscripts for publication'.[41]

Central to Cooper's approach was the introduction of the *cambiata* voice as a distinct category rather than a temporary inconvenience. Working with Karl Kuersteiner, Cooper divided male voices into four groups: unchanged sopranos, cambiata (first change), baritones (second change) and basses (changed voices).[42] He recommended voicings such as SACB or CCBB to replace standard tenor parts, arguing that these better accommodated the tessitura and tonal qualities of changing voices.[43] Cooper also cautioned against the use of SAB repertoire with cambiata singers, as it risked placing boys in ranges that could provoke embarrassing vocal breaks and contribute to disengagement.[44] His work is significant in that it explicitly acknowledged cambiata boys as a group requiring specialised pedagogical attention.

[38] Cooper, 'The Junior High School Choral Problem', 20.
[39] Phillip H. Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper (1900-1971) and the Development of the Cambiata Concept for Adolescent Changing Voices', *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 37 (2015), 78.
[40] Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper', 78.
[41] Cooper and Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music*, 28.
[42] Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper', 80.
[43] Leon Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices: What Do We Know Now?', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 12.
[44] Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper', 24.

Frederick Swanson, a music educator and director of the Moline Boys' Choir in Illinois, further contributed to early thinking on classification and pedagogy. Swanson emphasised the emotional vulnerability of boys during voice change and warned that ridicule or marginalisation could have lasting consequences for their musical confidence.[45] He noted that the treble voice does not disappear suddenly as lower pitches emerge and that, for a period, boys may be capable of singing both higher and lower registers.[46] Swanson advocated vocalising the falsetto register downward to help bridge gaps in the voice and suggested that boys sing with other boys during this stage to reduce self-consciousness.[47] He also attempted to align vocal change with broader models of pubertal development, comparing changes in the voice to recognised stages of physical maturation as outlined by Shuttleworth and noticing that it was upon reaching level three of Shuttleworth's stages that boys' voices began to change.[48]

While McKenzie, Cooper and Swanson made significant contributions by reframing voice change as a process that could be managed pedagogically, their work was largely grounded in practitioner observation rather than systematic scientific investigation. Even as these models gained traction, many prominent educators continued to promote the voice-break theory and advocated extended vocal rest during puberty.[49] The coexistence of these conflicting approaches throughout much of the twentieth century underscores both the importance of these early classification models and their limitations. Their work laid essential groundwork but also highlighted the need for empirical research capable of

[45] Swanson, *Music Teaching in the Junior High and Middle School*, 174.
[46] Ibid., 203.
[47] Ibid., 191.
[48] Swanson, *The Male Singing Voice Ages Eight to Eighteen*, 69.
[49] Wood, *The Gentle Art of Singing*, 22; Collins, *Teaching Choral Music*,123.

validating, refining and standardising approaches to adolescent voice classification, a need that would be addressed most comprehensively in the work of John Cooksey.

1.1.5 John Cooksey

The rejection of the traditional voice-break theory was grounded in practitioner observation and intuition, but choral educators needed more empirical evidence in order to confidently adopt this new understanding.[50] It was within this landscape that John Cooksey emerged as the most influential figure in establishing an evidence-based understanding of adolescent male voice change. John Cooksey was one of the most prolific researchers in the area of voice change. He built on the research of his predecessors by working in conjunction with scientists to bring rigorous scientific evidence into the literature on choral singing and changing voices. Cooksey began as a public-school teacher before becoming a professor at the University of Utah, Memphis State University and, finally, California State University-Fullerton. He studied with Cooper, who introduced him to research on voice change in male adolescents.[51] Cooksey recognised that many of the theories on voice change were based on anecdotal evidence and that a more scientifical method was needed. Starting in the 1970s, Cooksey became one of the leading researchers to assess the adolescent male voice in North America.[52] While many of his contemporaries concentrated on aspects like rehearsal technique and repertoire planning, Cooksey mainly focused on the science of voice development and how best to categorise the changes, building on his mentor Cooper's work.[53] He began to assess adolescent voices in the late 1970s. He used Cooper's cambiata plan as a starting

[50] Friar, 'Changing Voices, Changing Times', 28.
[51] Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices', 13.
[52] Marie van Gend, Philip Matthias, Nathan Scott and Christopher Allan, 'Australian Adolescent Voices: Rethinking the Choir', paper presented at the Australian Society for Music Education 21st Annual Conference, Melbourne, 13–15 July 2017, 20.
[53] Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices', 13.

point but sought to combine it with scientific evidence. In some cases, Cooksey utilised the scientific research of academics in other fields who were producing new findings on male puberty. He drew on the work of Tanner, to measure the stages of sexual development during puberty through a series of reference photographs.[54] He was also influenced by sonographic analyses that were emerging at this time.[55] Sonograms are useful to researchers in this field because they visually represent pitch, volume, and timbre, helping identify techniques such as vibrato and sustained notes. They also allow researchers to compare voices and map patterns across performances. Drawing on such scientific data, and combining it with his own observations, Cooksey developed a theoretical framework that brought together and tried to relate voice mutation stages experienced by young male adolescent voices and voice classification guidelines. He devised a six-part male adolescent voice classification model. He used the anatomical and physiological maturation stages that had been adopted by Frank and Sparber as a basis for his model.[56] He established clear criteria for classifying the changing voice: pitch range; tessitura; vocal quality; register development; and the average fundamental speech frequency.[57] His proposed model offered six stages of voice change: unchanged, midvoice I, midvoice II, midvoice IIA, new voice and emerging adult.[58] The purpose of this model was to develop an index of voice change that could determine how certain vocal or physical factors may affect the different voice change stages in adolescents and give recognisable characteristics of each stage of change that could be used by the conductor to correctly classify each voice.[59] He advocated for the assessment of singers

[54] Martin Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2014), 48.
[55] Cooksey, 'Voice Transformation in Male Adolescents', 721.
[56] Ibid., 721.
[57] Fisher, 'British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice', 45.
[58] van Gend et al., 'Australian Adolescent Voices', 21.
[59] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices,* 6.

on a regular basis so that they could be continually placed in a section appropriate to their classification. In doing this, he dispelled the idea of a voice breaking, which was the dominant belief among conductors at this time. Instead, he showed that, instead of breaking, the male adolescent voice gradually changed over time, transitioning through six stages.

In order to explore his model further, Cooksey's next step was to form a research team with two pathology professors, Ralph Beckett and Richard Wiseman, who had an interest in the human voice and, over a period of three years, they collected data on eighty-six seventh-grade boys from the Orange County Unified School District.[60] They tested each boy on a monthly basis during the school term on twenty-three items of data. Twenty-seven audio recordings were made of each boy over this period, amounting to 2,322 in total. The data affirmed the voice classification guideline model that Cooksey had created. This model remains today the most widely used model for classifying the male changing voice.[61] The research team also provided sample spectrograms of their recordings in order to demonstrate visually the different characteristics of each stage of the change. This element of the research is particularly interesting as it shows the quality of vocal production of the young singer throughout the different stages. It is possible to see from these spectrographic samples that the quality of certain frequencies change over time, and the physical changes that happen during each stage are visible. For example, by looking at a spectrogram of midvoice II, the singer's top notes are clearly weakening and becoming more unstable, while in the emerging adult voice, there is consistency and strength in the lower voice and the emergence of adult-like vibrato.[62] Through

[60] Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices', 13.
[61] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 63.
[62] Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices', 17.

spectrographic analysis, Cooksey was also able to show that unchanged voices produced the greatest number of most intense harmonics and that the new and settling baritones produced the fewest and least intense harmonics.[63]

Once the classification was created, Cooksey had a specific way of measuring where each young singers was in his lowest pitch of many boys to compile average ranges for each voice classification. He found that, on average, the singers' modal range extended from about four to six semitones below a boy's average speaking pitch to more than a ninth above it.[64] From this information, Cooksey was able to map out the optimum tessitura for each stage of the changing voice. This is one of the most useful elements of his research in terms of aiding conductors to choose appropriate repertoire for their choirs. By doing their own tests, a music director can place their singers in one of the six stages, better understanding their development. Many conductors and researchers across the world use Cooksey's framework, and his way of assessing the adolescent male voice remains the definitive system for most choral directors working with pubescent and pre-pubescent boys.[65]

In addition to his scholarly research on voice classification of adolescents, Cooksey produced literature for practitioners, highlighting the practical implications of his findings. In *Working with Adolescent Voices*, he explained how to utilise his research in a rehearsal, commenting on areas such as auditions, seating arrangements, vocal warmups with suitable ranges, and providing repertoire suggestions for changing voices. Cooksey also attempted to influence what he considered to be unhelpful parlance within choral

[63] Ashley, *How High Should Boys Sing?*, 46.
[64] Ibid., 50.
[65] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 63.

contexts. He was highly critical of the use of the term 'break' in relation to changing voices. He claimed that 'the destructive concept of an adolescent broken voice is completely indefensible. It bears no resemblance whatever to the dynamics of vocal growth during adolescence'.[66] Despite the work of Cooksey, however, there still persists a perception, albeit declining, that boys' voices break and this term continues to be used colloquially in choral contexts. However, Cooksey's work represents a decisive turning point in the field of adolescent male choral singing. By grounding voice classification in empirical research and articulating its practical implications for conductors, he provided a framework that remains the most widely used system for understanding and supporting changing voices. His research not only consolidated earlier pedagogical insights but also established a foundation upon which subsequent research and practice continue to build.

1.1.6 Contemporary perspectives

Since the late twentieth century, research into the adolescent male changing voice has become increasingly evidence-based, building on the foundational models of Cooksey, Cooper, McKenzie, and Swanson. Contemporary studies have worked to validate and refine these models. Patrick Freer highlights two areas of focus in recent research: the timing of puberty and voice change, and the relationship between a boy's body composition and vocal development.[67] Longitudinal investigations, such as the Cambridge Study by Meredydd Harries and colleagues, have confirmed that physical

[66] Martin Ashley, *Singing in the Lower Secondary School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 191.
[67] Patrick Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males: An Updated Look at "What Do We Know Now?"', *Choral Journal*, 63 (2022), 43.

growth stages correspond closely with voice change stages identified in Cooksey's longitudinal study, reinforcing the validity of his established classification system.[68]

Research into pitch accuracy and vocal range has further informed understanding of the changing voice. Elizabeth Willis and Dianna Kenny have examined intervallic accuracy in adolescent male singers and found that boys experience particular difficulty with octave leaps during voice change.[69] This study confirmed Cooksey's finding that 196 Hz (g3) is a key marker for boys going through change, as boys' voices are typically most stable and reliable for singing at this point.[70] Such findings provide practical insights for conductors in selecting repertoire that is both achievable and supportive of healthy vocal development. Martin Ashley's work complements these physiological studies, and along with his many sociological studies, one of his greatest contributions to research on voice change has been his collection of a bank of recordings of boys' voices, which have been supplemented by conversations with the boys about their own voice change.[71] Ashley also recorded different choirs with different voices singing different repertoire and analysed how appropriate the pieces were for the group using spectrograph analysis.[72] Janice Killian and John Wayman's research demonstrates that singers with regular, sensitive instruction retain extended ranges more effectively than those with intermittent or poorly

[68] Meredydd Harries, Sarah Hawkins, Jeremy Hacking and Ieuan Hughes, 'Changes in the Male Voice at Puberty: Vocal Fold Length and its Relationship to the Fundamental Frequency of the Voice', *Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, 112 (1998), 451–454; Graham F. Welch, 'Singing and Vocal Development', in Gary McPherson (ed.), *The Child as Musician: A Handbook of Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 319.
[69] Elizabeth C. Willis and Dianna T. Kenny, 'Effect of Voice Change on Singing Pitch Accuracy in Young Male Singers', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, 2 (1998), 111–119.
[70] Willis and Kenny, 'Effect of Voice Change on Singing Pitch', 111.
[71] To hear some of these recordings, see Martin Ashley's website <https://www.martin-ashley.com/copy-of-1000-voices-database-1> [accessed 21 December 2025].
[72] Martin Ashley 'What Voices have Emerged? Lessons on Boys' Vocal Dispositions and Choral Tone from a New Choral Leaflet Series', *Music Education Research*, 21 (2019), 147.

guided training, highlighting the importance of conductor expertise in navigating the cambiata stage.[73]

Overall, contemporary perspectives underscore the importance of a holistic approach that blends scientific understanding, pedagogical strategy, and repertoire management to support boys through vocal change and to keep them singing. The evolving body of research provides conductors with actionable insights to support healthy vocal development, sustain engagement, and nurture musical identity in adolescent males, while also emphasising that reasons for disengagement often extend beyond physiological changes to include social, motivational, and cultural factors. By applying these contemporary practices, conductors are better equipped to guide boys safely and confidently through voice change, ensuring that the choral experience remains rewarding and developmentally appropriate.

1.2 Social and emotional dimensions of male adolescence

While understanding the anatomical changes that boys experience during puberty is essential, effective practice as a conductor working with adolescent boys requires awareness of the broader social, emotional and psychological factors that shape their engagement, or lack thereof, in choral singing. This section examines these dimensions, highlighting the challenges and opportunities resulting from these broader contexts that conductors face when supporting boys through voice change. By foregrounding these aspects, the framework developed later in this dissertation will be informed, sensitive and

[73] Janice N. Killian and John B. Wayman, 'A Descriptive Study of Vocal Maturation Among Male Adolescent Vocalists and Instrumentalists', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 58 (2010), 6, 15.

aligned with the broader competencies required for effective conductor practice in the adolescent male choral context.

1.2.1 Developmental challenges for adolescent boys

Adolescence represents a pivotal stage of development when children lose characteristics associated with childhood and begin to transition towards adulthood, experiencing profound physical, social, emotional and psychological changes and establishing new behaviours.[74] This section examines some of these developmental challenges. It begins by considering the physical and anatomical changes beyond vocal development that occur during puberty, highlighting how these affect identity, self-perception and social interactions. It then explores social influences, including peer relationships, societal expectations around masculinity, and the impact of digital and media environments. Finally, it addresses emotional and psychological dimensions, such as mood fluctuations, risk-taking, mental health and coping strategies. Taken together, these factors provide the necessary contextual awareness for conductors to support boys' engagement, resilience and development during this transitional period. The subsequent section will focus on how these developmental realities influence boys' participation in music-making, and specifically singing in choirs.

Physical growth during adolescence is often irregular and uneven, leading to periods of clumsiness, coordination difficulties and heightened self-awareness.[75] Beyond vocal changes, boys undergo rapid changes in body shape, skin, including acne, height, and

[74] Anne-Lise Goddings, Stephanie Burnett Heyes, Geoffrey Bird, Russell M. Viner and Sarah-Jane Blakemore, 'The Relationship between Puberty and Social Emotion Processing', *Journal of Developmental Science*, 15 (2012), 801.
[75] Bridget Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box: Adolescent Voice Change in Music Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 15.

athletic ability, all of which can influence self-image and social interactions.[76] These physical transformations intersect with evolving identity and resilience, requiring adolescents to adapt to new capabilities and limitations. For conductors, understanding this variability is crucial, as it directly affects boys' confidence in singing, engagement in choral activities, and capacity to navigate the vocal challenges of puberty.

Adolescent boys are subject to strong societal pressures and peer norms, which shape behaviour, self-esteem and engagement. Societal expectations surrounding masculinity can pressure boys to demonstrate toughness, emotional restraint and aggression, and peer interactions may reinforce that behaviour perceived as insufficiently masculine is unacceptable.[77] Peer acceptance, humour, clothing choices, and risk-taking are all influenced, and bullying can occur, negatively affecting both perpetrators and victims in terms of self-esteem, mood and relationships.[78] In addition, boys are navigating romantic and sexual development, learning about consent, boundaries and respectful behaviour. Conductors must recognise that these social dynamics influence boys' motivation and participation in choir.

Digital and media environments add further complexity. Social media feedback, likes, comments and comparisons can affect self-esteem and mood, while cyberbullying and online risks persist.[79] According to the Pew Research Centre in 2025, 45% of American teens ages thirteen to seventeen, say they spend too much time on social media, up from

[76] Lina A. Ricciardelli, 'Body Image Development – Adolescent Boys', in T. F. Cash (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Body Image and Human Appearance* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press, 2012), 180–181.
[77] Christopher S. Reigeluth and Michael E. Addis, 'Adolescent Boys' Experiences with Policing of Masculinity: Forms, Functions, and Consequences', *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 17 (2016), 74.
[78] Nicole L. Rosen and Stacey Nofziger, 'Boys, Bullying, and Gender Roles: How Hegemonic Masculinity Shapes Bullying Behaviour', *Gender Issues*, 36 (2019), 295.
[79] Bikram Tikader and Amulya Kumar Acharya, 'Social Media Addiction in Teenagers – A Critical Review', *Internal Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10 (2025), 426.

36% in 2022.[80] Over-reliance on virtual interactions can affect a boy's ability to foster real-life interactions and connections.[81] Boys are now more likely to engage with artificial intelligence than girls, chatting with bots for advice, emotional support and therapy.[82] Excessive screen time can contribute to sleep disturbances, anxiety and reduced focus.[83] It can lead to a decline in social skills, resulting in an over-reliance on virtual interactions over real-life relationships.[84] Media portrayals of adolescent male identity, such as the 2025 Netflix series *Adolescence* function as 'both a psychological lens and a social mirror, revealing the complex inner lives of youth and the identity crises they face in an era saturated with digital stimuli and performative pressures'.[85]

Evidence indicates that many boys are struggling to navigate adolescence and are increasingly facing new challenges. In recent years, they have lagged behind their female counterparts in many areas of life. The 'Lost Boys' report, released in 2025 by the UK's Centre for Social Justice, lays out a stark state of play as to how boys are doing in society, claiming that boys and young men are in crisis.[86] While there have been great leaps forward for women, the report states that this generation of boys is being left behind 'by some margin'.[87] Rising numbers of young men aged fifteen to twenty-four are not in employment, education or training, highlighting wider societal pressures that intersect

[80] Michelle Faverio, Monica Anderson and Eugenie Park, *Teens and Social Media Mental Health* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Centre, 2025), 4.
[81] Natasha Parent, Kyle Dadgar, Bowen Xiao, Cassandra Hesse and Jennifer D. Shapka, 'Social Disconnection During COVID-19: The Role of Attachment, Fear of Missing Out, and Smartphone Use', *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31 (2021), 750–751.
[82] Ofcom, 'Online Nation: Report 2025' (2025), 35 <ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/online-habits/online-nation> [Accessed 9 November 2025].
[83] Tikader and Kumar Acharya, 'Social Media Addiction in Teenagers', 425.
[84] Tikader and Kumar Acharya, 'Social Media Addiction in Teenagers', 426.
[85] Rosalia Floriani, Arin Mantara Anggawirya, Survey Sijabat, Nurul Istiqomah and Evelin Giovani, 'An Exploration of Adolescent Psychological Issues in the Netflix Series Adolescence (2025)', *Lingua Franca*, 4 (2025), 68.
[86] Centre for Social Justice, *Lost Boys: State of the Nation* (London: Centre for Social Justice, 2025), 5.
[87] Centre for Social Justice, *Lost Boys*, 5.

with individual development.[88] Emerging patterns suggest that younger men are aligning more with conservative, traditionalist, and right-leaning movements, while younger women trend towards more liberal perspectives. John Burn-Murdoch observes that in an increasingly online existence, 'boys and girls no longer walk the same path from childhood to adulthood, with their interests, values and aims in life increasingly incompatible with each other'.[89] The rise of toxic masculinity among teenage boys is a great concern for parents and school communities where 'intervention is needed to encourage boys to embody healthy expressions and identities of masculinity.'[90]

Emotional and psychological development during puberty is equally important. Teenage boys often experience rapid mood shifts and heightened emotions, which can manifest as irritability, sadness, anxiety or withdrawal, and may be influenced by hormonal changes, school stress, peer dynamics and evolving identities during puberty.[91] In adolescence, depression and anxiety become more common, and warning signs can include ongoing sadness, social withdrawal, sleep or appetite changes, and reduced interest in activities.[92] Risk-taking and impulse control often increase, influenced by peers and sensation-seeking, and can include experimentation with drinking, drugs, reckless behaviour and sexual activity.[93] Emotional regulation develops as teens learn to recognise their emotions and apply a range of coping strategies to manage stress, disappointment, rejection and

[88] Hamed Rahmani, Wim Groot and Amir Mohammad Rahmani, 'Unravelling the NEET Phenomenon: A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-analysis of Risk Factors for Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training', *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 29 (2024), 1.
[89] John Burn-Murdoch, 'A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging', *Financial Times*, 26 January 2024 < https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998> [accessed 10 November 2025].
[90] Wilson et al., 'Operationalising Positive Masculinity', 1.
[91] Olivia Best and Sasha Ban, 'Adolescence: Physical Changes and Neurological Development', *British Journal of Nursing*, 30 (2021), 272–275.
[92] Thea Anderson, Rasa Valiauga, Christian Tallo, Catriona Blythe Hong, Shaminy Manoranjithan, Catherine Domingo, Manasvi Paudel, Ana Untaroiu, Samantha Barr and Kate Goldhaber, 'Contributing Factors to the Rise in Adolescent Anxiety and Associated Mental Health Disorders: A Narrative Review of Current Literature', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 38 (2025), 1.
[93] Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, 'Adolescence and Mental Health', *Lancet*, 393 (2019), 2031.

conflict across school, home and peer contexts.[94] Mental health stigma can cause boys to under-report distress, making safe, non-judgmental spaces essential.[95]

For conductors, understanding these developmental realities is essential. Adolescents' social, emotional and psychological states directly affect their motivation, engagement and resilience in musical contexts. Conductors must be able to recognise and respond to these influences, creating safe, supportive rehearsal spaces where boys can explore, experiment, and develop their voices without fear of embarrassment or judgement. By considering these extra-musical dimensions, conductors build the underlying knowledge and sensitivity necessary to support adolescent male singers effectively, laying the groundwork for the specialised competencies that will be articulated in the framework developed later in this study. The next section examines how these social, emotional and psychological dimensions impact on music participation and, specifically, on singing in choirs.

1.2.2 Adolescent males within the choral context

To keep young male singers engaged with choral singing, it is essential to recognise the sociocultural pressures they face. Adolescents often encounter expectations surrounding performance, sports, and hobbies, which can impact stress levels, time management, and self-worth.[96] Boys who do not participate in traditionally 'masculine' activities may experience denigration, and the rise of toxic masculinity has framed some extra-curricular

[94] Manuela Schmidt and Erika Hansson, 'Adolescent Boys' Experiences of Stress — A Focus Group Study', *BMC Psychology*, 12 (2024), 2.
[95] Michael Wilson, Kate Gwyther, Ray Swann, Kate Casey, Ross Featherston, John L. Oliffe, Matt Englar-Carlson and Simon M. Rice, 'Operationalizing Positive Masculinity: A Theoretical Synthesis and School-Based Framework to Engage Boys and Young Men', *Health Promotion International,* 37 (2022), 1.
[96] Schmidt and Hansson, 'Adolescent Boys' Experiences of Stress — A Focus Group Study', *BMC Psychology*, 12 (2024), 2.

activities, including singing, as feminine.[97] This perception directly affects engagement in choral contexts. According to Jon Swain, peer groups among boys have a 'fundamental influence on the construction of masculine identities' and 'provide boys with a series of collective meanings of what it is to be a boy', ensuring that 'there is constant pressure on individuals to perform and behave according to the expected group norms'.[98] Consequently, choral activities, generally not considered masculine, may expose boys to teasing and ridicule from peers.[99]

Proper voice classification and well-chosen repertoire alone do not solve the problem of missing males in youth choirs. Adolescents often focus only on what is directly in front of them, and many struggle to see the bigger picture.[100] This situation poses a challenge for conductors working with boys, as the changing voice requires delayed gratification on the part of the boys and calls for qualities such as resilience and sustained motivation to be imparted to achieve their goals. Boys experiencing these changes may become frustrated and bored, sometimes replacing their choral activities with something they perceive as more immediately or reflective their abilities at that moment.[101] Between the ages of eleven and fourteen, many young males report leaving choral programmes due to a range of social factors. One of the most significant challenges is that the boys who stop singing during voice change rarely re-engage with choral activities and are lost.[102]

---

[97] Anthony Young, 'The Adolescent Male Changing Voice: Physiological, Psychological and Practical Considerations for Classroom Music Teachers', *Australian Kodaly Journal* (2012), 41.
[98] Jon Swain, 'How Young Schoolboys Become Somebody: The Role of the Body in the Construction of Masculinity', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24 (2003), 302.
[99] Mishall Surti, 'Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom', *Canadian Music Educator*, 50 (2008), 38.
[100] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 63.
[101] Patrick Freer, 'Adapt, Build, and Challenge: Three Keys to Effective Choral Rehearsals for Young Adolescents', *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 49.
[102] Patrick Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys from Middle School to High School Choral Music', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 11.

Voice change itself introduces additional difficulties for boys in choral contexts. As their voices are unpredictable during voice change, singing can be felt as a source of embarrassment and leave them feeling vulnerable, particularly when singing in front of girls.[103] Scott Harrison's research on sex stereotyping of musical instruments, revealed that, of ten ranked instruments, the flute and clarinet were perceived as feminine, while the trombone and drums were seen as masculine; the voice ranked as the third most feminine instrument.[104] Martin Ashley noted that 'it is undeniable that for most ten- to fourteen- year- old boys, a degree of socio-cultural distance from girls is about as fundamental an element of young male identity as there can be'.[105] Many boys also view singing in an alto or high tenor range as being unmasculine and inferior.[106] Conversely, some boys perceive that their mature voice sounds worse than their unchanged singing voice, particularly when experiencing breaking, cracking and squeaking.[107] The timing of voice change varies, meaning that some boys experience it earlier than their peers, while others remain trebles long after their peers have moved to other sections of the choir. This irregularity can separate friends who previously supported each other in rehearsal, as their voices may no longer align. Ideally, boys would transition together, but this is often not possible. As Fisher emphasises, choral directors need to 'establish a safe, educational rehearsal environment where male singers can make mistakes and vocally explore and experiment without criticism'.[108]

---

[103] Ashley, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum?', 312.
[104] Scott Harrison, 'A Perennial Problem in Gendered Participation in Music: What's Happening to the Boys?', *British Journal of Music Education*, 24 (2007), 267–280.
[105] Ashley, *How High Should Boys Sing?*, 58.
[106] Julia Eklund Koza, 'Big Boys Don't Cry (or Sing): Gender, Misogyny, and Homophobia in Collage Choral Methods Text', *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, 4/5 (1993), 51.
[107] Bill Quinn, 'Music Makers: Choir – Recruiting Adolescent Boys for Choir', *Canadian Music Educators Association*, 45 (2004), 35.
[108] Ryan A. Fisher, 'Research-to-Resource: A Choral Director's Abridged Guide to the Male Voice Change', *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 38 (2019), 4.

Anita Collins' healthy music ecosystem for boys provides a framework to understand the social and motivational factors that affect boys' participation in music. The model identifies three categories: motivating factors, internal influences, and external influences.[109] The motivating factors are those elements that directly encourage boys to engage with music, including peers and male role models, inspiring and enthusiastic teaching, and achieving goals and seeing tangible progress all reinforce continued participation. [110] She also recognises internal influences, referring to aspects over which educators have limited control. These include parents, peers, and role models, all of whom shape boys' attitudes toward choir, often in ways that extend beyond the rehearsal room.[111] External influences are factors that educators can actively shape to support engagement. [112] The school culture can set standards, fostering a positive rehearsal atmosphere and encouraging collaboration. Teaching strategies should focus on methods that actively engage and inspire boys. Relationships that encompass fostering constructive interactions with staff and peers through structured social opportunities and the development of resilience, behavioural standards, and the capacity for delayed gratification are all essential for navigating the challenges of voice change.[113] Collins' ecosystem illustrates that engagement in choral singing is shaped by far more than vocal ability alone. Each element functions as a supportive network, helping boys remain involved during voice change. As Collins emphasises, 'the more we invest in

[109] Anita Collins, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', in Scott Harrison (ed.), *Male Voices: Stories of Boys Learning through Making Music* (Camberwell: ACER Press, 2009), 34. The ecosystem was updated in Anita Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 95–107.
[110] Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', 102.
[111] Ibid., 101.
[112] Collins, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', 41.
[113] Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', 102.

understanding boys, the more that investment will pay off. The more we invest in the whole boy, the more he will invest in himself'.[114]

All of these aforementioned social, emotional and psychological factors contribute to the issue of the missing male in choral contexts, and ways of overcoming them must be pondered by choral practitioners. Boys undergoing voice change can be heavily influenced by their peers of the same age. Older boys who sing in the choir can have a great influence on retaining the younger singers, but this is not always feasible.[115] If boys see men singing, it tends to make singing a more favourable activity to do. It is also important that the process of voice change is explained to the young singers in a clear way, going through each stage of change with them. Many teachers have found that having these conversations with their singers, made voice change seem like a natural process and something that they can take ownership of.[116] Working with young singers requires more than voice classification and repertoire; conductors must also recognise the many other factors that potentially discourage boys from participating.

1.3 Bridging understanding and practice

This chapter has outlined the physiological, social and emotional characteristics of adolescence and considered how these developmental changes influence boys' engagement and participation in choral settings. It has also traced the historical attitudes toward boys' singing and demonstrated how contemporary understandings of adolescent

[114] Ibid., 106.
[115] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 118.
[116] Henry Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice: Take The High Road', *Choral Journal*, 49 (2009), 59.

development have shifted over time. Together, these insights provide essential foundational information for anyone working with adolescent male singers. However, while this developmental knowledge is necessary, it is not sufficient for understanding what makes a conductor effective in this highly specific context. Conductors must be able to translate an understanding of adolescent development into practice through a coherent set of professional competencies. What matters, therefore, is not only what conductors know about adolescent boys, but how they enact this knowledge musically, pedagogically and relationally within the choral environment. Identifying the precise competencies that enable conductors to support, motivate and develop adolescent male singers sits at the core of this dissertation. The subsequent chapters build on the developmental foundation established here to investigate the competencies required for conductors to be able to effectively support adolescent boys, ultimately working towards a comprehensive competency framework for conductors in this specialised context.

Chapter Two

Methodology

2.1 Project design

The aim of this study is to develop a research- and practice-informed framework of competencies required by choral conductors for the effective working with male adolescents undergoing voice change. Although a number of models and frameworks exist for general choral conducting, no comprehensive structure has been created specifically to address the needs of conductors working with male adolescents during the cambiata stage.[1]

In order to build this framework, design-based research was adopted as a methodological approach. As outlined by Terry Anderson and Julie Shatter, design-based research is well suited to work that draws on both scholarly literature and lived professional expertise.[2] Its iterative nature allows a framework to be refined through cycles of design, feedback, and revision, while its emphasis on mixed methods supports integrating literature review findings with practitioner insights. Importantly, design-based research does not only aim to produce a contextually useful framework, but also to generate transferable design principles that can inform broader practice and theory. For a project developing a practical framework with practitioner input, design-based research therefore offers a methodology that is collaborative, responsive, theory-informed, and oriented toward real-world impact.[3] Accordingly, the framework at the centre of this study was constructed by

[1] For an example of applying the theoretical models to a specific context, namely community choirs, see Naomi Cooper, 'Design-Based Research as an Informal Learning Model for Choral Conductors', *London Review of Education*, 15 (2017), 358–370.
[2] Terry Anderson and Julie Shattuck, 'Design-Based Research: A Decade of Progress in Education Research?', *Educational Researcher*, 41 (2022), 16.
[3] Ibid., 16–18.

integrating evidence from three types of sources: an analysis of relevant literature, a review of current training provision and interviews with experienced practitioners.

The analysis of the literature in Chapter Three examined both existing competency models for conductor education and research relating to conducting adolescent changing voices. The review of current training provision, also in Chapter Three, included a survey of programmes and professional development opportunities that focus on working with cambiata singers, helping to identify how the profession currently prepares conductors in this area. Finally, interviews with experienced practitioners, specifically conductors in Ireland who work regularly with adolescent male singers, provided practice-based insights that complemented the published literature and training landscape. Together, these sources offered a broad, balanced foundation from which to construct the framework.

Once the data was collected, a rigorous, multi-step analytic process followed. Interview transcripts were coded deductively, using categories deriving from the synthesis of the literature, and inductively, allowing additional themes to emerge from conductors' descriptions of real behaviours, decisions and challenges. These narrative accounts were analysed to identify recurring and effective conductor behaviours, underlying knowledge and skills and contextual factors that influence conductor actions and shape practice in cambiata settings. These findings were organised into competency domains in alignment with patterns and structures emerging from both the data and existing competency frameworks. This ensured coherence with established approaches and specificity to the needs of adolescent male singers.

The final outcome of the study is an evidence-based framework of competencies for conductors working with male adolescents. It is not only grounded in current research on adolescent vocal development but also addresses identified gaps in existing conductor training and reflects the lived experience of expert practitioners working in cambiata contexts.

2.2 Methods for data collection

The evidence gathered from the synthesis of the literature, the survey of current training provisions and the interviews with expert conductors informed the development of the framework. Bringing together the literature helped to identify established models, best practices and theoretical insights relevant to adolescent male vocal development and choral leadership more generally. The training landscape analysis highlighted gaps in existing professional development, showing which skills and knowledge are underrepresented in current provision. Finally, the interviews provided detailed, behaviour-focused evidence of real-world practices and challenges and effective strategies employed by experienced conductors. Together, these three sources of evidence allowed the construction of a framework that is both research-informed and grounded in the practical realities of conducting adolescent male singers, ensuring its relevance, applicability and potential impact for conductor education and professional practice.

2.2.1 Analysis of literature: Models and frameworks for conducting

The first step in developing the framework was a rigorous review of existing literature on choral conducting competencies and leadership models. This phase examined published competency frameworks, choral leadership models and theoretical perspectives on effective conducting, with particular attention to the knowledge, skills and attitudes they

identified as essential for conductors. While these models and frameworks are designed for general choral practice, analysing them provided a valuable starting point for this study. By identifying the core elements common across existing research, it became possible to determine which aspects could inform work with adolescent male singers and which areas required adaptation or expansion. This analysis, therefore, established the foundational concepts that were later tailored towards the specific needs of conductors working with changing voices.

2.2.2 Analysis of literature: Conducting adolescent changing voices

The second phase of the analysis of the literature focused on research specifically related to conducting and coaching adolescent boys through voice change. The review synthesised evidence-based best practices for working with young singers, including approaches to vocal health, rehearsal strategies, repertoire selection, psychosocial support and ethical considerations in mentoring adolescent boys. Its purpose was to identify the competencies that conductors need to effectively guide and nurture boys during this critical developmental period. This phase of the literature analysis provided a detailed understanding of the knowledge, skills and personal attributes necessary for conducting adolescent boys through voice change, offering key evidence to inform the identification and organisation of competencies in the emerging framework.

2.2.3 Survey of the training landscape

To inform the development of a framework that supports effective choral leadership when working with adolescent male singers, the study examined current training provisions, including formal degree programmes and continuing professional development offerings. This analysis aimed to map the workshops, courses and curricular emphases currently

available to conductors. Understanding the existing training landscape was essential for several reasons. First, it allowed for the identification of gaps where the preparation of conductors for working with cambiata singers is limited or absent and it highlighted benchmarks of good practice in conductor education. Though the review did not discover any new components for the framework, the information generated informed decisions about the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes that the framework should emphasise, the pedagogical approaches most appropriate for developing these competencies, the alignment of recommended practices with formal credentials and opportunities for the future evaluation of the framework's effectiveness in professional settings. By situating the framework within the context of existing training, this study ensures that the output is both relevant to professional practice and adoptable within current educational structures.

2.2.4 Interviews

The final stage of data collection for the framework involved a series of semi-structured interviews with expert conductors who work regularly with adolescent boys in Ireland. A semi-structured format was chosen to balance consistency across participants with flexibility, allowing for comparable data while enabling in-depth exploration of individual experiences and unexpected insights.[4] Ten conductors from diverse choral backgrounds, all of whom regularly work in Ireland and/or Northern Ireland with adolescent boys undergoing voice change, were invited to participate and all agreed. Each interview was conducted online via Zoom, lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes, and was carried out sensitively and with respect for each interviewee's individual practice to minimise stress. Consistent with the semi-structured interview approach, participants

[4] Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 8th edn, 2017), 512.

received in advance a detailed information sheet introducing the project, along with a consent form and a list of potential topics to be discussed.

The interviews were designed using Lyle Spencer and Signe Spencer's 'Five Steps to a Behavioural Event Interview (BEI)' to ensure relevance to the field of adolescent changing voices.[5] The BEI approach was chosen for its ability to elicit rich, behaviour-focused data, capturing real-world professional practice rather than hypothetical responses. The primary objective of a BEI is to obtain detailed descriptions of how individuals perform their work in actual situations, focusing on specific past events in which participants recount what they did, thought, and experienced. This method helps reveal underlying competencies, decision-making processes, and recurring patterns of practice that may not emerge through more general interview techniques.[6] Participants were prompted to recount specific events, including both high points (successes) and low points (challenges or failures), allowing the researcher to identify effective strategies, decision-making processes and underlying competencies. This approach enabled meaningful comparisons between participants' practices, highlighting the knowledge, skills, personal attributes and contextual factors that contribute to high-performing conductors while providing rich evidence to inform the subsequent development of the framework. The BEI approach was particularly appropriate for this study because it provided insight into behaviours that may not be evident from literature or formal training programmes. This emphasis on concrete professional behaviour ensured that the resulting framework reflects real-world practices and competencies relevant to conducting adolescent male singers.

[5] Lyle M. Spencer and Signe M. Spencer, *Competence At Work: Models for Superior Performance*, (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 118–119.
[6] Spencer and Spencer, *Competence At Work*, 118–119.

There are six steps to a BEI:[7]

1. Introduction and explanation: The interviewer introduces himself/herself/themself and outlines the format. 1a (optional): There can be a discussion of education and previous work experience.
2. Job responsibilities: The interviewee describes his/her/their most important job tasks and responsibilities. The interviewer can ask clarifying questions on his/her/their remit and his/her/their approach.
3. Behavioural events: The interviewee is asked to recount two or three significant successes and key failures or challenges in their professional practice.
4. Characteristics needed to do the job: The interviewee reflects on the knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes required to do the job effectively.
5. Context: The interviewee discusses broader contextual factors affecting his/her/their work.
6. Conclusion: The interviewer thanks the participant and concludes the interview.

Consistent with this structure, the interview topics were organised under five key headings: background; professional practice; challenges and successes; key qualities of effective conductors; and a section on the broader context of male participation in singing in Ireland. The following list of topics was presented to the participants:

[7] Ibid., 118–119.

1. Background

- Your education and training
- Your professional background in choral conducting

2. Professional Practice

- Specific experience with adolescent male singers
- Tasks and responsibilities

3. Challenges and Successes

- Challenges that you have encountered
- Memorable successes or moments of growth

4. Key Qualities of Effective Conductors

- Personal traits or skills that you believe are essential
- Advice for new or aspiring conductors in this field

5. Your Thoughts

- The participation of boys in choirs in Ireland
- The future of adolescent male participation in choral singing

During the interviews, participants were prompted and clarifications were sought as necessary to ensure responses were clear and relevant. Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison advise to press 'for clarity and elucidation, rephrasing and summarizing where necessary and checking for confirmation of his/her understanding of the issue, particularly if the issues are complex or vague'.[8] This guidance was followed to ensure that participants' responses remained focused and fully explained, while allowing for the exploration of unexpected insights as they emerged. The interviews generated

[8] Cohen, Manion and Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 512.

rich, detailed, behaviour-focused data that, alongside the literature analysis and training landscape analysis, informed the creation of an evidence-based framework of competencies for conductors working with adolescent boys undergoing voice change.

2.3 Analysis of the data

The analysis of the study's data followed a systematic, multi-stage process designed to synthesise insights from the literature, the survey of training provision and the interviews into a coherent framework of competencies for conductors working with adolescent boys. Each data source was analysed both independently and comparatively, allowing for triangulation and validation of emerging themes and competencies.

2.3.1 Analysis of literature and training data

The literature and training landscape survey were analysed to identify existing knowledge, models and skills relevant to adolescent male vocal development and choral leadership. Both the literature and the programme contents were coded deductively for key competency areas, including knowledge, technical skills, pedagogical strategies, psychosocial components and leadership practices. Patterns, gaps and points of emphasis were documented to establish an understanding of what is considered essential in current practice and training, providing both a foundation for the framework and a point of comparison for the qualitative data collected in the interviews.

2.3.2 Analysis of interview data

Interview transcripts were analysed using a combination of deductive and inductive coding. Deductive codes were derived from the literature and training review, reflecting competencies and best practices already identified. Inductive codes emerged directly from

the participants' narratives, capturing behaviours, decisions and strategies not represented in the existing literature or formal training programmes. Not all meaningful information was captured as a formal code. Analytic memos were used to record interesting observations, reflections or insights that could inform framework development, highlight contextual factors and support speculation surrounding the future of the framework. These memos allowed the analysis to remain flexible and responsive to the richness of the interview data.

The analysis of the interview data was based on the process outlined by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke and included the following steps:[9]

1. Familiarisation: Transcripts were read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences and to note initial impressions.
2. Coding: Deductive codes were applied based on literature-informed competencies, while inductive coding captured new, context-specific behaviours and skills reported by the conductors.
3. Theme Development: Codes were grouped into recurring patterns and broader competency domains, such as technical, pedagogical, interpersonal and contextual skills. Themes were refined iteratively, comparing cases across participants to identify commonalities and variations.
4. Validation: Emerging themes were cross-checked against the findings from the literature and the survey of training provision to ensure that the framework was both evidence-informed and reflective of current professional practice.

[9] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2006), 77–101.

This approach, which combines research and practice, ensured that the resulting framework is grounded in real-world practice, captures expert knowledge and addresses gaps identified in both the literature and training provision. Competencies were organised into domains reflecting both the natural connections between certain behaviours and skills identified in the interviews and the structure of existing conductor competency frameworks. This produced a clear and actionable evidence-based framework that distinguishes general competencies from context-specific ones, acknowledging that while some competencies are shared by conductors in all contexts, those working with adolescent males have particular challenges, opportunities and responsibilities.[10]

[10] Child, Simon F. J. and Shaw, Stuart D., 'A Purpose-led Approach Towards the Development of Competency Frameworks', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44 (2020), 1147– 1149.

Chapter Three

Foundations for a New Framework

3.1 Models and frameworks for conducting

This section presents a detailed analysis of existing models, frameworks and writings on choral conducting, focusing on the competencies and contextual considerations that underpin effective practice. It explores the transition from traditional, authority-focused approaches to contemporary leadership models that emphasise adaptability, relational skills and socio-cultural awareness. The analysis identifies recurring themes and structures within these frameworks, providing a foundation for developing a competency framework tailored to conductors working with adolescent male singers.

3.1.1 Changing approaches to conducting

For much of the twentieth century, choral conducting training concentrated on skills that were immediately attainable, such as the conductor's vocal knowledge, rehearsal techniques and conducting gesture.[1] The conductor-ensemble relationship was historically framed around the figure of a 'strong, charismatic, autocratic leader with great skill and knowledge'.[2] In practice, this often combined inspiration, through motivational talk or incentives, with coercion, including 'sarcasm, punitive extra rehearsals, threats to take away prized chairs', to ensure the ensemble achieved its objectives.[3] Jansson describes this historical perspective of the role in terms of 'maestro writing', a type of literature in

[1] S. Gail Allen and Hilary Apfelstadt, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', *Choral Journal*, 38 (1990), 25.
[2] Ramona Wis, *The Conductor as Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2007), 2.
[3] Wis, *The Conductor as Leader*, 2.

which great conductors share insights drawn from their personal experience.[4] While informative, these writings tend to be situational and anecdotal, reflecting the conductor's individual perspective rather than research-based principles. This body of work exemplifies the personality-driven approach historically dominant in choral leadership. Hungarian conductors such as Arthur Nikisch and Eugene Ormandy famously reinforced this mindset, asserting that 'conductors are born, not made'.[5] Claims like this helped to perpetuate the notion that great conducting is a form of innate, 'magic and unteachable' skill.[6]

As the field of choral conducting developed, however, scholars and practitioners have increasingly challenged the personality-driven, authoritarian assumptions that shaped traditional conducting pedagogy. While such historical approaches were often effective in commanding attention, they tended to obscure the deeper principles and values that underpin effective leadership in a choral context.[7] Traditional models paid limited attention to the broader responsibilities of conductors, such as fostering positive rehearsal cultures or engaging in reflective practice and rarely invited conductors to consider the kind of leaders they wished to be. A significant shift emerged in the late twentieth century, as leadership studies across disciplines and in popular discourse moved away from top-down personality-driven control towards more collaborative, adaptive and relationship-oriented models.[8] This wider cultural turn influenced choral conducting

[4] Dag Jansson, 'Musical Leadership: The Choral Conductor as a Sensemaker and Liberator' (PhD dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music, 2013), 45.
[5] Colin Durrant, 'Towards a Model of Effective Choral Conducting: Implications for Music Education, Musical Communication and Curriculum Development' (PhD dissertation, Roehampton Institute London, 1996), 59.
[6] Jansson, 'Musical Leadership', 45.
[7] Patrick Freer, 'Education Research: Practical Implications for the Rehearsal', *Choral Journal*, 33 (1992), 29.
[8] For an example of a popular publication, see Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (London: Simon and Schuster, 3rd edn, 2020), 18–19.

pedagogy, prompting a growing interest in character-based and principle-led approaches.[9] In choral contexts, these approaches began to emphasise elements such as communication, interpretation, collaborative music-making and the development of shared purpose.[10] Rather than relying solely on charisma or authority, they prioritise intentionality, ethics and clarity of musical and pedagogical vision. Such perspectives suggest that effective conducting is grounded in principles that can be taught, reflected upon and refined, making leadership development more accessible for emerging conductors.

Colin Durrant's 'supermodel choral conductor' illustrates the evolution of more traditional ideas surrounding the role of the conductor, acknowledging the importance of the conductor's philosophical grounding and interpersonal awareness, but retaining his emphasis on the conductor's role as the central musical and organisational authority.[11] His tripartite model (musical-technical skills, interpersonal considerations and philosophical principles) implicitly maintains a hierarchical conception of the conductor, even while acknowledging the necessity of positive relationships and healthy rehearsal cultures. Therefore, his framework marks a transitional moment between more traditional interpretations and the contemporary, principle-driven approaches found in later scholarship, highlighting the changing nature of conducting pedagogy during the late twentieth century.

[9] Thaddeus Hunt and LaVonne Fedynich**, '**Leadership: Past, Present, and Future: An Evolution of an Idea', *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 8 (2018), 24.
[10] Allen and Apfelstadt, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', 30–31.
[11] Durrant, 'Towards a Model of Effective Choral Conducting', 213–215; Colin Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003), 100–103.

Hilary Apfelstadt's work also reflects this shift. Across her contributions, including her early article on leadership styles with Gail Allen and her later chart entitled 'Windows for Leadership Directory', she encourages conductors to reflect on the values and assumptions underlying their practice.[12] Apfelstadt and Allen identified three broad leadership orientations: behavioural, situational and transformational leadership. Behavioural leadership views leadership as a set of observable actions, assuming that conductors can learn and apply effective behaviours in rehearsal and performance.[13] However, this orientation risks treating leadership as technique alone, without considering the beliefs, values or contextual pressures that shape its effectiveness. Situational leadership recognises that a conductor's approach must adapt according to ensemble needs, musical demands and interpersonal contexts.[14] Transformational leadership, informed by the work of Susan Armstrong and Scott Armstrong, emphasises attending to singers' needs, nurturing shared purpose and centring the choir's musical and personal growth above the conductor's ego.[15] Armstrong and Armstrong write that 'the "transformation" that occurs in teachers and students is the bottom line'.[16] Apfelstadt and Allen invite conductors to evaluate their own leadership stances and to consider the implications of leadership choices in different musical and developmental contexts, which is particularly significant in contexts involving adolescent boys whose vocal and social needs may shift rapidly.

[12] Allen and Apfelstadt, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', 30–31; Hilary Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', *Choral Journal*, 37 (1997), 26.
[13] Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', 24.
[14] Ibid., 24–25.
[15] Allen and Apfelstadt, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', 26–30; Susan Armstrong and Scott Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', *Music Educators Journal*, 82 (1996), 22–25.
[16] Armstrong and Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', 25.

The influence of transformational leadership has been particularly significant. Armstrong and Armstrong's six principles (charisma and enthusiasm, positive modelling, a shared vision, producing music through people, empowerment and encouraging the heart) reposition the conductor not as an authoritative figure directing subordinates but as a facilitator of collective artistry.[17] Their definition of transformational leadership as a decrease in personal interests in favour of shared cohesion and process aligns well with the needs of adolescents undergoing voice change, who often benefit from supportive, inclusive, caring, collaborative and relationally-sensitive leadership.[18]

Other scholars and practitioners have also contributed to the literature regarding the move towards principle-led approaches. Ramona Wis draws from broader leadership literature to identify 'spheres of leadership' relevant to choral settings: vision, trust, teaching, persuasion and character.[19] She argues that effective leadership rests on passion, genuine care for people and a deliberate desire to lead, which are qualities that extend well beyond gestural technique or rehearsal management. Wis's model positions leadership as a purposeful set of commitments rather than innate charisma. Similarly, Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad reframe the conductor's role through a lens that emphasises the relational and contextual nature of leadership.[20] While their model includes musical-technical and existential components, the situational-relational dimension is particularly aligned with contemporary attitudes.[21] This element highlights the conductor's

[17] Susan Armstrong and Scott Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', *Music Educators Journal*, 82 (1996), 22–25.
[18] Ibid., 25.
[19] Wis, *The Conductor as Leader*, 27–28.
[20] Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences: Perceptions and Priorities', *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43 (2021), 3–21.
[21] Ibid., 5–6.

responsibility to engage responsively with the ensemble, to choose appropriate modes of intervention and to offer mentorship.

3.1.2 Conductor competencies

3.1.2.1 Musical and technical competencies

Across the literature, musical and technical competencies remain foundational to effective choral conducting and there is broadly consistent view of the musical and technical foundations required of conductors, even though each author frames them through a slightly different lens. Durrant provides a foundation for many of the later works by identifying a wide range of musical-technical skills that underpin a conductor's artistic and organisational capacity.[22] These include a high level of aural skills and error detection, a gestural vocabulary capable of conveying tempo, phrasing, dynamics and character and a detailed knowledge of choral repertoire. Durrant also emphasises the importance of vocal technique, the ability to warm up voices appropriately, score preparation and an understanding of the aesthetic potential of the music. Such competencies enable the conductor to shape musical intention clearly. Jansson, Døving and Elstad build on Durrant's work by categorising core musical-technical competencies as score proficiency, repertoire knowledge, aural and error-detection skills, vocal technique, language skills and an understanding of choir acoustics.[23] Significantly, these competencies can typically be developed outside the ensemble setting and in preparation for rehearsals.

[22] Durrant, 'Towards a Model of Effective Choral Conducting', 214. This was later adapted into Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 100–103.
[23] Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences', 5–6.

Alan Gumm's six conducting functions also contribute substantially to definitions of musical-technical competence, focusing on how the abilities outlined in both Durrant and Jansson, Døving and Elstad's models translate into communicative physical technique.[24] His 'mechanical precision function' captures the beat patterns, cues and cut-offs essential to clear communication, while the 'expressive function' concerns gestures that shape musical nuance. The 'physical technique function' and 'unrestrained tone function' extend this further by addressing physicality and tone production, reinforcing the idea that the conductor's body is a technical instrument shaped by informed intention. Apfelstadt contributes to this area through her model, in which she describes the musical skills necessary, such as artistic intuition, musicality, expressiveness and aural sensitivity.[25]

Maria Varvarigou extends this understanding by situating musical-technical competence within broader pedagogical and relational processes, highlighting that the effectiveness of these skills depends on how they are used in the service of learning, communication and ensemble development. Her framework positions these competencies in relation to the tutor–learner dynamic, acknowledging that technical musical decisions must be informed by the needs and abilities of the ensemble.[26]

Across the literature, musical-technical skills form the essential groundwork upon which all other competencies rest. Without technical fluency and musical insight, the conductor cannot lead rehearsals effectively, respond to the ensemble in real time or support singers' individual and collective development. For the purposes of this research,

[24] Alan Gumm, 'Six Functions of Conducting: A New Foundation for Music Educators', *Music Educators Journal*, 99 (2012), 43.
[25] Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', 26.
[26] Maria Varvarigou, 'Modelling Effective Choral Conducting Education Through an Exploration of Example Teaching and Learning in England' (PhD dissertation, University of London, Institute of Education, 2009), 224.

particularly in relation to conducting adolescent boys experiencing voice change, these competencies provide the structural foundation of conductor effectiveness. They establish the minimum level of musical expertise required before conductors can meaningfully engage with the more specialised interpersonal and pedagogical challenges associated with changing voices. In this way, the musical-technical domain becomes not only a foundation but a necessary precondition for the adaptive, responsive and context-sensitive conducting that this study ultimately seeks to explore and enhance.

3.1.2.2 Pedagogical competencies

Pedagogical competencies encompass a conductor's capacity to facilitate learning using both musical and extra-musical competencies and to reflect critically on their own teaching practice. Having emphasised that successful conductors must balance musical instruction with the development of extramusical skills, such as communication, motivation and leadership, Apfelstadt mentions that 'confidence is fostered through musical and pedagogical preparation' but does not explicitly include it in her 'Windows for Leadership Directory'.[27] Durrant's framework, while primarily focused on musical-technical and interpersonal skills, also implies a pedagogical dimension when he mentions that conductors 'should operate as teachers, not just as instructors, rather as promoters of learning'.[28] However, Varvarigou extends this perspective, explicitly framing pedagogy within a tutor-learner model that incorporates cognitive apprenticeship and explicit teaching methods.[29] This explicitly pedagogical approach underlines the conductor's role not merely as a performer or director but as an educator who models, scaffolds and guides singers' learning in ways that are sensitive to the ensemble's

[27] Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', 26.
[28] Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 99.
[29] Varvarigou, 'Modelling Effective Choral Conducting Education', 224.

developmental stage. Varvarigou's inclusion of learners in her model responds to Jansson's criticism of Durrant's failure to include this explicitly in his model.[30]

Taken together, these models suggest that pedagogical competence extends beyond the transmission of musical knowledge to include the integration of technical instruction, interpersonal awareness and responsiveness to the specific context of the ensemble. In the context of adolescent boys' choirs, this integration may be especially important, as conductors need to balance the development of vocal technique with sensitivity to the singers' social and emotional dynamics. These insights indicate that pedagogical skills could form an essential component of the framework developed in this research, supporting both musical growth and engagement while fostering confidence and motivation during a period of significant developmental change.

3.1.2.3 Interpersonal competencies

In line with the move towards character-based and principle-led approaches, interpersonal competencies are widely acknowledged as central to effective choral leadership, complementing the musical-technical foundation of conducting. Durrant identifies a range of interpersonal skills that underpin successful rehearsal and performance environments.[31] These include the ability to create a positive, non-threatening atmosphere, communicate clearly and unambiguously, encourage healthy singing, support choral and vocal development, instil confidence in singers, pace rehearsals effectively and uphold high artistic standards, highlighting the practical, day-to-day relational competencies that facilitate productive interactions between conductor and ensemble.[32]

[30] Jansson, 'Musical Leadership', 47.
[31] Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 100–103.
[32] Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 100–103.

Similarly, Gumm emphasises the psychosocial function of conducting, noting that conductors must share the intention behind their gestures and motivate singers in a way that fosters engagement and cohesion.[33] Armstrong and Armstrong further develop this perspective through their transformational leadership model, highlighting principles such as empowering others, encouraging participation and working towards shared goals.[34] These competencies align closely with the broader principle-based approaches, which emphasise collaboration, empathy and relational awareness over personality-driven authority.

Jansson, Døving and Elstad situate interpersonal skills within a situational-relational framework, emphasising the conductor's capacity to mentor, guide and adapt to the specific needs of the ensemble.[35] These situational-relational competencies include not only rehearsal organisation and interventions but also a heightened awareness of the social and emotional dynamics of the group. Varvarigou and Durrant similarly underscore the importance of clear and effective communication in building ensemble trust and cohesion using some methods such as 'reflective practice, collaborative learning and regular feedback' to singers.[36] Apfelstadt's theory also integrates interpersonal elements, framing them alongside musical competencies to show how conductors can balance technical execution with extramusical relational factors.[37] She recognises that the effectiveness of the musical competencies depends on how they integrate with broader non-musical elements, such as articulateness, confidence, effort, enthusiasm and

[33] Gumm, 'Six Functions of Conducting', 44–48.
[34] Armstrong and Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', 22–25.
[35] Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences', 5.
[36] Maria Varvarigou and Colin Durrant, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors: A Suggested Framework', *British Journal of Music Education*, 28 (2011), 336.
[37] Apfelstadt, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', 26.

initiative.[38] She argues that the binding of both 'represents a kind of gestalt or artful fusion of both musical and extramusical characteristics in the leadership directory', suggesting that the musical and technical skills described above do not operate in isolation but in relationship to the conductor's interpersonal approach.[39]

Considered together, these frameworks indicate that interpersonal skills are not peripheral but central to the conductor's effectiveness. They enable the leader to translate musical-technical knowledge into meaningful ensemble outcomes, foster motivation and commitment and cultivate a positive and inclusive choral culture. In the context of adolescent singers, these skills may be particularly important, given the social and emotional changes experienced during this period as described in Chapter One. Developing relational awareness, adaptive communication and supportive leadership could therefore play a key role in promoting engagement, confidence and cohesion within the ensemble. These insights point to interpersonal competencies as a potential component to include in the framework being developed through this research.

3.1.3 Contextual considerations

The application of the attitudes and skills is shaped by the broader contexts in which conductors work. Contextual factors encompass the immediate rehearsal situation, the socio-cultural environment of the ensemble and characteristics specific to particular groups of singers. Recognition of these factors highlights that conducting is not a one-size-fits-all practice and even highly skilled conductors must adapt their leadership and teaching strategies in response to the ensemble's needs, social dynamics and

[38] Ibid., 26.
[39] Ibid., 27.

developmental stage. The following section explores these three overlapping dimensions: situational factors, socio-cultural contexts and singer-specific considerations. This section highlights potential considerations for inclusion in a framework aimed at supporting conductors in highly specific contexts.

A number of models emphasise that the effectiveness of choral conductors depends not only on their skills and competencies but also on how these are applied in specific rehearsal situations. Varvarigou highlights the influence of rehearsal context, including the sequence and amount of training, as well as the nature of interaction between tutor and learner.[40] Gumm similarly notes that the function of conducting gestures is contingent upon the rehearsal environment, suggesting that technical actions must be interpreted relative to context.[41] Jansson expands this further through his discussion of overall rehearsal organisation and situational intervention strategies, illustrating the multiple ways a conductor may intervene with singers depending on the musical and logistical demands of a session.[42] He notes that 'a more subtle feature is that interpersonal skills are inseparable from situational and artistic judgement – the ability to constantly balance'.[43] These works indicate that situational awareness is a critical component of effective conducting and one that could be considered for inclusion in the framework emerging from this research.

Beyond the immediate rehearsal environment, broader socio-cultural factors shape the conductor's approach and the ensemble's response. Varvarigou positions culture, community and institutional settings as key parameters influencing the conductor's

[40] Varvarigou and Durrant, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors', 332.
[41] Gumm, 'Six Functions of Conducting, 43.
[42] Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences', 5–6.
[43] Dag Jansson, Erik Døving and Beate Elstad, 'The Construction of Leadership Practice: Making Sense of Leader Competencies', *Leadership*, 17 (2021), 565.

decisions and interactions.[44] Armstrong and Armstrong similarly link leadership effectiveness to group cohesion and shared values, emphasising that a conductor's ability to inspire and guide depends on alignment with the ensemble's social and cultural dynamics.[45] Jansson's concept of the conductor's existential foundation further underscores that a conductor brings a personal and philosophical commitment to the group, which interacts with the socio-cultural environment to shape rehearsal outcomes.[46] For research exploring adolescent choirs, these insights suggest that socio-cultural context is an important lens through which leadership and pedagogical strategies might be adapted, rather than a set of fixed rules.

Working with adolescent singers introduces additional, developmentally specific challenges. Though not specifically concerned with this cohort, Apfelstadt highlights the need for conductors to 'be equipped to communicate musical ideas in verbal and nonverbal ways to people whose interests and abilities vary widely'.[47] Varvarigou and Durrant additionally foregrounds learners' perspectives, noting that adolescents' perception of the conductor's role can significantly shape their motivation and responsiveness.[48] These findings all suggest that adolescent-specific considerations represent a critical dimension of conducting practice, offering potential areas for emphasis in a framework that aims to support conductors working with young singers in developmental transition.

[44] Varvarigou and Durrant, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors', 325.
[45] Armstrong and Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', 25.
[46] Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 'Choral Conducting Competences', 5–6.
[47] Hilary Apfelstadt, 'Keys to Successful Teacher Education', *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 5 (1996), 4.
[48] Varvarigou and Durrant, 'Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors', 332.

Overall, these contextual factors illustrate that effective choral conducting cannot be understood solely in terms of competencies. Instead, these factors interact with competencies to shape the conductor's decisions and effectiveness in real-world settings. For the purposes of this research, they indicate potential considerations to include in the emerging framework, highlighting areas where conductors may need to adapt their approach to the situation, cultural environment or developmental stage of the singers.

The literature on conductor approaches, competencies and contextual factors illustrates that effective choral leadership is multifaceted. Historical and traditional models emphasise the conductor as a central authority with strong musical, technical and interpersonal skills, while contemporary, character- and principle-led approaches foreground reflective practice, leadership style and relational awareness. Across these models, musical and technical, interpersonal and pedagogical competencies emerge as interdependent elements, enabling conductors to translate expertise into meaningful ensemble outcomes. Contextual factors further shape how these competencies are enacted in practice. These insights provide a foundation for an emerging framework that recognises the interplay of skills, approaches and context, and point towards the specific adaptations required when working with adolescent boys' choirs. This perspective naturally leads into the literature on conducting adolescent boys' choirs, where physical changes and associated social-emotional factors create specific challenges, require particular competencies and offer opportunities for contextually responsive conducting.

3.2 Conducting adolescent changing voices: Analysis of literature

What follows is a structured analysis of the literature on conducting adolescent male singers. Its purpose is to map the main roles, responsibilities and areas of focus identified in the existing research and pedagogical writings, establishing the landscape of practice

and knowledge that conductors draw upon when supporting changing voices. From this analysis, three key domains emerge as central considerations in adolescent choral pedagogy: the voice, the music and the people. This thematic overview provides a frame for the interviews. Within the domains, certain competencies that are most frequently emphasised across studies are explored in detail. The competencies provide valuable data that will be used in the subsequent synthesis in Chapter Five, where recurring elements from the literature, training provision and practitioner insights are integrated into a comprehensive framework of conductor competencies for working with adolescent male singers.

3.2.1 The voice

As the instrument at the heart of this work, the voice is the primary area of concern for those working with male adolescent changing voices. The literature affirms that conductors must not only have a deep understanding of the vocal mechanism but also understand how to support singers in developing their vocal technique and provide them with appropriate repertoire that allows for sustainable singing.

3.2.1.1 Knowing the voice

A deep understanding of the adolescent voice is an essential technical competency for conductors working with boys undergoing vocal change, including knowledge of the vocal mechanism and puberty-related challenges and separate from the pedagogical skills to convey this knowledge effectively. Much of the literature on this topic emphasises understanding these vocal changes and the associated educational strategies as central to effective conducting with this group. These studies frequently cite one or more authors who offer voice classification models or other information on what changing voices can

and cannot sing at different stages of their development. They tend to provide guidance on how to determine an individual's stage in the voice-change process and track progression over the time of their voice change. According to Rollo Dilworth, a teacher when working with young adolescent singers, should be 'equipped to help these singers manage their developing voices', beginning with obtaining 'a thorough understanding of the changing voice'.[49] Teachers should be aware of the strengths and limitations of their young singers' voices and base their approach on the most up-to-date current research to support them during this period of change. Patrick Freer expands on this by emphasising that those working with young voices should be aware of and utilise research-supported resources that support the adolescent voice, integrating current findings into their teaching methods to ensure instruction is informed and effective during this critical developmental stage.[50] He advocates for the use of 'research-supported techniques for warming up adolescent choral groups', claiming that they 'can enhance students' vocal skills, their musicality, and their confidence'.[51] Freer echoes David Brunner's emphasis on warm-ups, with Brunner specifying that warm-up exercises should focus on 'body posture, breath management, vocalisation, and the acquisition or refinement of skills'.[52] Henry Leck summarises the key areas of knowledge a conductor should possess about the voice, including an understanding of vocal production, the voice parts male adolescents should sing at any given stage of their development and ways to mitigate vocal issues.[53] Theoretical knowledge of the changing voice, therefore, is the foundation upon which conductors working with male adolescents must build their practice in relation to all the

[49] Rollo Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices in the Choral Rehearsal: A Survey of Research-Based Strategies', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 24.
[50] Patrick Freer, 'Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 95 (2009), 57.
[51] Ibid., 52
[52] David L. Brunner, 'Carefully Crafting the Choral Rehearsal', *Music Educators Journal*, 83 (1996), 38.
[53] Freer, 'Choral Warm-Ups', 58.

other facets of the voice, including assessing, developing, choosing repertoire and accurately placing the voices within a choir. Martin Ashley likens this understanding to that of a composer writing for a specific instrument, arguing that boys will 'sing well if the conductors and arrangers of their music understand the principles in such a way that good musical tones and sound techniques are available for them to imitate'.[54] Without this foundational knowledge of the changing voice, conductors are at risk of perpetuating unhelpful and even potentially damaging ideas, such as the notion of the voice 'breaking', which is a term that John Cooksey and others have worked to replace with the more accurate and constructive term 'voice change'.[55] Related to this, Ashley, in his study of independent schools in the United Kingdom, found that a persistent belief among teachers remained that voices 'broke'.[56] Though there are many examples of success within these contexts, he suggests that the pedagogy of already successful teachers would possibly be improved through greater knowledge of voice change in general and Cooksey's work specifically within both teacher and conductor education.[57]

To support boys through voice change, the literature agrees that conductors should understand and apply voice classification systems for adolescents, which provide a framework to locate young singers on their vocal development journey. To understand the changing voice, the conductor must grasp the concept that vocal change in adolescent boys undergoes a series of transformations. Cooksey's classification model is the most widely cited in the literature and provides a systematic way for tracking vocal

[54] Martin Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2014), 25.
[55] John Cooksey, 'The Development of a Contemporary, Eclectic Theory for the Training and Cultivation of the Junior High School Male Changing Voice: Part II: Scientific and Empirical Findings; Some Tentative Solutions', *Choral Journal*, 18 (1977), 8.
[56] Martin Ashley, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum? The Impact of Research on UK School Choral Practice with Boys', *British Journal of Music Education*, 30 (2013), 322.
[57] Ibid., 325.

progression.[58] A proper understanding and assessment of vocal development ensures that each student is placed in the correct part, fostering healthy vocal growth, confidence and a positive choral experience. Cooksey explains that 'it is important for conductors of adolescent boys to thoroughly understand his system and be able to chart out where a boy is on their vocal journey at any time'.[59] By correctly classifying a singer's stage of development, conductors can make informed decisions about vocal part placement, repertoire selection and vocal exercises. This supports vocal safety and boosts the choir experience, but assigning a suitable part is only a starting point. Boys need ongoing, guided support through the voice-change process. As Freer writes, 'we do not seek to understand the changing voice through voice classifications, but that 'the classifications result from our understanding of the changing voice'.[60]

Classifications are useful for tailoring instruction to the evolving needs of singers and for tracking their current vocal status, informing targeted areas to work on. Leck and Bridget Sweet both caution that classification systems, while helpful, are not comprehensive. Leck conveys the potential limitations of classification systems, urging conductors to go beyond the theoretical models and to ensure that the singers are looked at more comprehensively.[61] Similarly, Sweet notes that while classification systems are highly valuable for conductors working with adolescent voices, voice change encompasses much more than these classifications and other factors, such as physiological, psychological and emotional considerations, are also essential to fully assess and support students'

[58] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 63.
[59] John Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2nd edn, 1999), 12–13.
[60] Patrick Freer, 'Foundation of the Boy's Expanding Voice: A Response to Henry Leck', *Choral Journal*, 50 (2010), 33.
[61] Henry Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice: Take The High Road', *Choral Journal*, 49 (2009), 51.

experience of voice change.[62] Leck and Sweet both point out that a thorough understanding of the relevant vocal technique and physiology is necessary to guide individuals at their own pace through the change.

Accurate assessment is essential for meaningful classification and being able to assign voices to a particular stage, regardless of the system chosen, allows conductors to tailor their teaching and support the ongoing transition from boy to adult voice, ultimately contributing to the success and well-being of young male singers. Cooksey's system begins with finding the temporary 'Average Speaking Fundamental Frequency' (ASF0). The use of the word 'temporary' is key here, as it refers to something that will change over time. This is the standard pitch at which a boy speaks. Following this, a range test can be undertaken and the tessitura considered by assessing the average pitch ranges in which the boys sing their cleanest, least restricted tone.[63] Cooksey suggests that individual testing of a boy's voice should take place at least every six to eight weeks, as it is not unusual for the LTP (Low Terminal Pitch) to drop by one to two semitones. Therefore, this is an important task for a conductor working with boys' changing voices to engage with regularly.[64]

Recording and communicating a boy's vocal changes in real time is valuable. Cooksey recommends that each singer maintain an individualised range chart to monitor progress.[65] Not only should conductors understand the boy's voice, but the boys should know theirs. Recording and sharing progress enables self-directed learning. A systematic

[62] Bridget Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box: Adolescent Voice Change in Music Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 134.
[63] Leon Thurman, 'Boys' Changing Voices: What Do We Know Now?', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 14.
[64] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 29.
[65] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 29.

approach to this can be seen in an information guide produced by The National Youth Choir of Scotland's artistic director, Christopher Bell, to support boys going through voice change.[66] This booklet includes Cooksey's charts, essential vocabulary, questions and answers, blank range charts for ASF0 and vocal range, and prompts for self-assessment to help boys reflect on their voice development. By employing a consistent use of terminology and conceptual language, students can learn to internalise these terms and concepts, facilitating their students' ongoing development as singers and fostering both their understanding and their technical growth.[67]

Importantly, assessment must be handled with sensitivity. Dilworth highlights that it is vital for the conductor to be sensitive and creative when assessing boys' voices, as it is a time in their lives when they are self-conscious about their voice and their bodies in general.[68] Freer further notes that a mismatch between a singer's vocal range and the demands of the repertoire can lead to disengagement and even attrition from choir, which is a risk that underscores the importance of accurate, respectful assessment.[69] Ultimately, conductors must both understand and communicate the changing voice, guiding singers with supportive, constructive feedback. With foundational knowledge of vocal classification, they can apply appropriate techniques to safeguard vocal health and support development during this critical period.[70] Freer emphasises the importance of conductors communicating this information about voice change to their singers, ensuring those experiencing the changes have accurate knowledge to understand and track their

[66] Christopher Bell, *My Voice is Changing!: Useful Information for Boys, Choir Directors, and Parents Before and During Voice Changes* (Glasgow: National Youth Choir of Scotland, 2001).
[67] Patrick Freer, 'Adapt, Build, and Challenge: Three Keys to Effective Choral Rehearsals for Young Adolescents', *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 50.
[68] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 24.
[69] Patrick Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males: An Updated Look at "What Do We Know Now?"', *Choral Journal*, 63 (2022), 47.
[70] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 24.

own vocal development effectively.[71] He observes that students experiencing voice change are 'fascinated with their physical development in general and with their vocal development in specific', often eager to monitor their vocal progress and share these observations with their conductor.[72] Although literature emphasises using best-practice knowledge for changing voices, Janice Killian found that many conductors struggle to integrate this information into their pedagogy, even though they recognise its relevance and seek more knowledge.[73] This gap between awareness and application signals a need for better training and resources for those working with adolescent voices, despite consensus on the importance of knowing the voice.

3.2.1.2 Developing the voice

For conductors working with adolescent singers, particularly boys undergoing voice change, a key responsibility is guiding vocal development through pedagogically-sound and physiologically informed instruction. Central to this is the teaching of healthy vocal technique, including the promotion of breath support, freedom of vocal production and an ease of motion that prevents tension and injury. Conductors must be attentive to signs of vocal fatigue, discomfort or strain and be prepared to adapt their approach as needed. Freer stresses that adolescent males often do not abandon singing due to the changes in their voices but because they 'did not receive the information and musical instruction they needed about how to navigate and sing with their new vocal capabilities'.[74] This shows that technical expertise must be communicated in an accessible way to adolescent boys

[71] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 50.
[72] Ibid., 50.
[73] Janice Killian, John B. Wayman, and Patrick M. Antinone, 'Choral Directors' Self Report of Accommodations Made for Boy's Changing Voices: A Twenty Year Replication', *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 9 (2021), 22.
[74] Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males', 46.

and that conductors should demystify voice change and foster confident, sustained participation in singing.

Adolescents benefit greatly from gradual vocal exploration, positive reinforcement and a supportive rehearsal environment. By carefully guiding young singers through their transition, conductors can promote long-term vocal health and ensure a successful, enjoyable choral experience. According to Sweet, many adolescents lack a foundational understanding of how the voice functions, lacking 'a basic understanding of how the voice is produced, let alone what happens during voice change', which makes the experience of voice change confusing and intimidating.[75] She argues that 'knowledge can be extremely powerful', as the more they understand about vocal anatomy, the less scary voice change can be and the more likely they are to persevere through challenges and continue singing, thus enabling students to better cope with the transitions of puberty and remain engaged in singing.[76] Freer adds that many boys are deeply intrigued by the changes in their own voices and that effective conductors use this natural curiosity as a pedagogical advantage by giving 'current, detailed physiological descriptions of the voice change process that so clearly intrigues most boys'.[77]

Paul Roe argues that teachers must directly address the physiology of the voice in class when working with adolescent boys, thereby connecting instruction to observable, real changes.[78] He advocates for singing through the change but highlights that students

[75] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 39.
[76] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 39.
[77] Patrick Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys from Middle School to High School Choral Music', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 13.
[78] Paul F. Roe, *Choral Music Education*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2nd edn, 1994), 178.

should sing within a comfortable range and avoid strain.[79] The use of falsetto in adolescent males is a frequently discussed topic in the literature. Many writers believe that it is important for young male singers to gain access to their falsetto as early as possible during voice change. Cooksey highlights that range extension and the smooth transition between the modal and falsetto registers can be very useful in developing a boy's voice, though challenging.[80] Others like Frederick Swanson, however, view the 'falsetto tenor' as a valuable tool, advocating for boys to sing in a treble voice long after the more mature bass notes have emerged.[81] In essence, he believes that the boy will learn to develop a wide range by singing this way. Duncan McKenzie advocated practising descending scales from the falsetto voice to the changed voice, but instead of going as low as possible with the falsetto voice, he said that 'the aim should be to pass into the changed voice as high as possible'.[82] Leck, as an advocate of this expanding-voice theory, supports this approach, writing that it is important to use a boy's high voice while his voice is changing, suggesting to 'sing descending exercises down across the register break'. The singers would start the exercises by singing in their falsetto voice and continue across the register, gradually transitioning into their lower voice.[83] Ashley is an advocate of boys using falsetto during voice change, when possible, observing that in some cases, boys lose the purity of tone very quickly, but others can continue to sing in falsetto for a surprisingly long time.[84] Jenevora Williams encourages boys to use falsetto in their warmups and from time to time in singing repertoire, as long as the main body of singing is in the fundamental comfort zone as a young developing singer. However,

[79] Roe, *Choral Music Education*, 180.
[80] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 38.
[81] Frederick Swanson, 'Changing Voices: Don't Leave Out the Boys', *Music Educators Journal*, 40 (1984), 49.
[82] Duncan McKenzie, *Training the Boy's Changing Voice* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1956), 42.
[83] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 55–56.
[84] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 76.

several authors caution against overusing or forcing the use of falsetto. While it is important to explore different parts of the voice, Dilworth warns conductors to 'exercise great care when working with adolescent males'.[85] He suggests that the singers should sing where they are most comfortable and allow the boys to rest vocally if they experience any fatigue.[86]

A substantial body of literature supports peer learning and exposure to vocal role models to accelerate adolescent vocal development. Christopher and Donna White suggest that conductors introduce diverse male role models to demonstrate different male voice types, including falsetto.[87] Exposure to peer voices also allows young singers to hear subtle differences in timbre, registration and range, which is an important part of their classification and self-awareness process. Cooksey points out that the way young, developing singers are placed within the choir can affect the tone produced. He urges conductors to consider placing the younger, developing voices among the more experienced. This gives them confidence and a sense of what they may be like once their voices are fully developed. However, he cautions that in some situations, this may not work as the junior singers may try to compete with the older singers, which may lead to vocal strain.[88] Older section leaders, particularly those who have recently experienced voice change themselves, can be powerful motivators and models. Those with advanced vocal skills can be an asset in a youth choir setting, as young people often respond more positively to feedback from their peers than from their teachers.[89] Adolescents respond well to peer feedback and may embrace vocal experimentation when guided by someone

[85] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 29.
[86] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 29.
[87] Christopher D. White and Donna K. White, 'Commonsense Training for Changing Male Voices', *Music Educators Journal*, 87 (2001), 42.
[88] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 29.
[89] Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys', 14–15.

closer in age. Karen Graffius recommends using recordings of good and poor tone, along with rubrics, to help students critically evaluate vocal quality.[90]

The literature frequently highlights posture and breathing as important factors in achieving good singing, noting these as common areas of difficulty for adolescent boys. Cooksey suggests that it is vitally important to establish 'good habits of proper posture and breathing for singing'.[91] Ashley notes that many technical faults in young singers can be traced to these physical habits. [92] Jenevora Williams reinforces this view, writing that 'good posture requires balance with alignment' and that body awareness is essential to vocal control and efficiency.[93] Conductors, according to Williams, must address these physical elements regularly, helping students build awareness of their bodies and how alignment influences sound production.[94] Techniques rooted in the work of body-based pedagogies, such as the Alexander Technique, may also be employed by conductors to cultivate healthy singing posture and reduce tension. Rather than focus on set ideas such as posture and alignment, the Interactive Teaching Method Alexander Technique studies the relationship between thinking and movement and the idea of achieving freedom and ease of motion. It does not adhere to the idea of prescribing specific posture commands, as these commands themselves may lead to tension and defeat the purpose of the whole exercise.[95]

3.2.1.3 Placing the voice

[90] Karen Graffius, 'Cultivating Tone with Your Middle School Choir', *Choral Journal*, 65 (2025), 15–16.
[91] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 37.
[92] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 11.
[93] Jenevora Williams, *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2nd edn, 2018), 85.
[94] Ibid., 85.
[95] Donald L. Weed, *Reach Your Dreams: An ITM in Introduction to the Alexander Technique* (Bristol: ITM Publications, 2012), 36–38.

Most Western choral music uses standard voicings (SATB for mixed choirs and SSA for upper voices) that assume fully developed adult voices and broad tessituras. For adolescent boys undergoing voice change, these rigid classifications often do not fit their evolving ranges and forcing them into unsuitable parts can cause frustration and dropout. A more flexible approach is needed to accommodate their changing voices.

Assessing vocal development is essential for choral directors, as is assigning appropriate parts. Researchers have developed models to categorise adolescent boys' voice changes, advocating classifications that accommodate evolving ranges and use terminology that reflects the changing voice. Common labels for early or transitional stages include terms like 'unchanged voice', 'mid-voice' or 'altotenor', while more settled voices are typically labelled as 'tenor', 'baritone' or 'bass'. Recognising these stages allows conductors to tailor their teaching and support the ongoing transition from boy to adult voice, ultimately contributing to the success and wellbeing of young male singers. Assigning a voice like this to the standard voicings can prove to be a challenge.

The conductor determines the number of parts based on the choir's ability, but the suitability of specific choral forces also depends on the singers' vocal ranges and tessitura. When working with youth choirs and changing male voices, the literature suggests that the repertoire voicing must align with developmental stages, guiding the selection of pieces that fit the ensemble. This ties directly to repertoire choice. Conductors may select standard SAB or SATB settings if the singers can be accommodated, while some works may label parts (e.g., TB) in ways that reflect cambiata voices rather than true range, underscoring the need for flexibility in voicing decisions. Lon Beery, in his collection of choral songs, writes for three voice parts: high voices

(tenor 1), middle voices (tenor 2) and low voices (baritone). [96] His music is written using his own range charts from the literature, such as Cooksey, Irvin Cooper and McKenzie. Other composers, such as Ian Crawford, go a step further by explicitly writing for these developing voices, using less common voicings such as SAC (soprano, alto, cambiata) or CCTB (cambiata I, cambiata II, tenor, bass).[97] The conductor may also label a young singer in multiple ways. For example, he could sing cambiata II in one piece and tenor in another. In this way, the conductor is adapting the choir's voicing to suit the repertoire.

In an all-boys' group, Cooksey recommends that the changing voice classifications be divided into three subgroups, labelled as high, middle and low. Unchanged and midvoice I are put in the high group, midvoice II and midvoice IIA constitute the middle group and new baritone/emerging adult voices sing the lowest part.[98] This model, developed by Cooksey, is very useful because it does not specify exactly what kind of voicing a choir must have. Instead, it provides a framework that a conductor can adapt and tailor to meet their choir's specific needs.

It is crucial to exercise caution when assigning labels to young singers. It is important to be clear with singers when they have not yet fully developed into tenors and basses but also to be aware that adolescent boys do like to be labelled with the same terms as their older peers. [99] It is important to communicate to the young male singers that voice change is different for every boy. Graham Welch suggests that age is a poor predictor in determining voice change. In some cases, singers can pass through all six stages of

[96] Lon Beery, *The Cambiata Collection: Range-ready Repertoire for Developing TTB Choirs* (Van Nuys, California: Alfred, 2020).
[97] Ian Crawford, *Changing Voices: Songs for Boys* (London: Novello, 2017).
[98] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 29.
[99] David Friddle, 'Changing Bodies, Changing Voices: A Brief Survey of the Literature and Methods of Working with Adolescent Changing Voices', *Choral Journal*, 46 (2005), 46.

change within one year, while in others it can take several years.[100] Cooksey argues for the importance of organising seating arrangements for a choir rehearsal with young singers so they can easily move to sing parts within their range and sit between different parts as needed. This flexibility allows them to be part of a larger choir and to be integrated with relative ease.[101] Marie van Gend adds that 'it is effective to arrange a choir so that they can still be standing next to the other boys, rather than being a lone boy in a sea of girls'.[102] Along with Philip Matthias, Nathan Scott and Christopher Allan, van Gend writes that singers should move to the part/s that best fits their voice, rather than remaining bound by rigid conventional SATB voicings, thus recognising and normalising the process of constant vocal change for adolescent singers and allowing conductors to be responsive to the singers.[103] Freer echoes this by saying that males usually settle into their final voicing during the end of high school or the beginning of college, so it is important not to label singers with a specific voice part until then.[104] Ashley cautions against labelling singers too soon, highlighting that 'young men need guidance through voice change, probably even more than boys need guidance through their treble stages'.[105] Ashley also believes that it is important to be flexible when planning rehearsals with changing voices and that the conductor should 'prioritise the developmental needs of the young singers'.[106] It is important to note that although this research project is focused on adolescent boys, these issues also apply to girls going through voice change. It is equally

[100] Graham F. Welch, 'Singing and Vocal Development', in Gary McPherson (ed.), *The Child as Musician: A Handbook of Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 325.
[101] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 29.
[102] Marie van Gend, 'Australian Mixed-Voice Secondary School Choirs: A Case Study of Changing Voices' (PhD dissertation, University of Newcastle, 2019)
[103] Marie van Gend, Philip Matthias, Nathan Scott and Christopher Allan, 'Australian Adolescent Voices: Rethinking the Choir', paper presented at the Australian Society for Music Education 21st Annual Conference, Melbourne, 13–15 July 2017, 27.
[104] Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males', 46.
[105] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 124.
[106] Ibid., 124.

important that they too are not confined to being overly categorised to specific, rigid voice parts too early in their development.[107]

The conductor's role with adolescent voices requires a deep, evolving understanding of vocal development during voice change in order to inform repertoire selection and the placing of voices. This includes applying technical knowledge with sensitivity, flexibility and pedagogical skill to nurture technique, promote healthy habits and create a supportive environment where singers can explore their changing voices. Accurate assessment and careful voice placement guide appropriate part assignments and repertoire, ensuring each singer has opportunities to succeed while safeguarding vocal health and encouraging ongoing musical growth and lifelong engagement with singing.

3.2.2 The music

The conductor's role in this context requires a deep, evolving understanding of vocal development during voice change, but it is the application of this knowledge that is crucial. Applying technical knowledge and pedagogical skill nurtures technique, promotes healthy habits and creates a supportive environment where singers can explore their changing voices. Accurate assessment and careful voice placement guide appropriate part assignments and repertoire, ensuring each singer has opportunities to succeed while safeguarding vocal health and encouraging ongoing musical growth and lifelong engagement with singing.

3.2.2.1 Rehearsing

[107] Lynne Gackle, *Finding Ophelia's Heart: Nurturing the Adolescent Female Voice* (Dayton, Ohio: Heritage Music Press, 2018), 24–25.

For adolescent boys undergoing voice change, the rehearsal time is pivotal for guiding development and equipping them with both musical and non-musical skills. The literature shows that successful conductors structure rehearsals with the boys' best interests in mind and that, when planning a rehearsal, many standard considerations remain the same. Durrant lists some of the main areas of concern in a standard choir setting as creating the environment, creating the atmosphere, warm-ups, planning and preparation, verbal and non-verbal language, movement in choral rehearsal, spacing and acoustics and intelligent rehearsing.[108] All of these areas could easily apply to planning a rehearsal, including boys undergoing voice changes. However, working with adolescent boys requires another level of thinking on top of these foundational concepts.

The conductor leading a rehearsal must have a thorough understanding of all factors involved in working with adolescent boys, including puberty and the changing voice.[109] According to Ashley, 'the most significant variable (of the quality of teaching young adolescent boys) is the charisma, passion and leadership quality of the individual teacher'.[110] How the conductor interacts with the boys going through voice change can have a profound impact as to whether they will stay in choir. Although every boy will develop differently and each one has his own unique challenges, having the knowledge of how to work with adolescent boys in a group setting will facilitate effective choral rehearsals.[111] For adolescent boys, engaging in high-quality singing experiences is the primary draw to participating in a choir.[112] According to Freer, boys going through voice change like 'physical movement, fast instructional pacing, substantial peer interaction,

[108] Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 107.
[109] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 6.
[110] Ashley, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum?', 325.
[111] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 24.
[112] Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males', 46.

skill-based challenges and highly rhythmic repertoire'.[113] Sport-like, active music-making can work well with boys where activities like singing while walking, using physical gestures as a kinaesthetic metaphor, clapped ostinato games can be successful.[114]

The rehearsal space gives boys a unique opportunity to develop into mature young adult singers. A well-planned rehearsal, with thoughtfully designed processes, helps set them up for lasting success. According to Anthony Young, a teacher must endeavour to maintain an environment that is a safe place to sing and allows the boy to experiment with his voice.[115] Rick Stamer believes that it is essential that the conductor pays close attention to the personal and musical development of the young singers to foster a nurturing environment.[116] Mishaal Surti contends that it is very important that the boys know that they are in a safe space and that 'getting laughed at in class by [a] best friend for [a] cracking voice' should not be accepted.[117] Craig and Maria Denison argue that fostering a positive attitude towards voice change requires providing young singers with clear information about the physiological changes occurring in their bodies, helping them embrace these changes rather than be unsettled by them.[118] In some cases, when the conductor is of the opposite gender, it can be challenging for the singers to pitch in the correct octave. In such situations, it is important to emphasise to the singers that the focus is on the quality of vocal production and applying those techniques to their own voices in the correct octave for them. Additionally, using student vocal models can be a helpful

[113] Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys', 14.
[114] Anthony Young, 'The Adolescent Male Changing Voice: Physiological, Psychological and Practical Considerations for Classroom Music Teachers', *Australian Kodaly Journal* (2012), 42.
[115] Ibid., 42.
[116] Rick A. Stamer, 'Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal', *Music Educators Journal*, 85 (1999), 26.
[117] Mishaal Surti, 'Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom', *Canadian Music Educator*, 50 (2008), 38.
[118] Craig Denison and Maria Denison, 'Uncovering Meaning and Identity through Voice Change', *Choral Journal*, 59 (2019), 30.

alternative, providing clear and relatable examples for the singers.[119] Leck suggests that it is important for everyone in the choir to be aware that adolescent boys' voices may tire more during a rehearsal and that they may not sing every note.[120] When the entire choir is made aware of this, it fosters better understanding and empathy within the group, enhancing overall cohesion and collaboration. Ashley suggests, as an underlying pedagogic principle when working with adolescent male singers, that 'practical competence precedes propositional understanding'.[121] He suggests that younger boys learn best by absorbing what they hear and see and then singing it back. Then, when the boys are older, technical explanations of what is happening can be supplied to them in order to help them improve and maintain their interest.[122]

Warm-up routines serve as a foundation for technical development and are especially crucial for adolescent choirs. They give the opportunity for adolescent boys to explore their new changes through different vocal exercises. Mary Copland Kennedy recommends regular vocal monitoring and small group work, suggesting that such approaches are key to identifying signs of stress and promoting individualised support.[123] Freer states that effective choral conductors often use the warm-up session as an opportunity to 'establish a vocabulary of musical skills and techniques common to all participants'.[124] This gives the opportunity to link the repertoire directly to the techniques and skills explored in the warmup, reinforcing the learning. Ryan Fisher suggests that choir directors should include vocal agility exercises in warmups with adolescent boys'

[119] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 51.
[120] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 59.
[121] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 25.
[122] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 25.
[123]Mary Copland Kennedy, '"It's a Metamorphosis": Guiding the Voice Change at the American Boychoir School', *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 54 (2004), 277.
[124] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 52.

voices but strongly encourages them not to over-exert them before the actual rehearsal.[125] Choral warm-ups for adolescents must differ from those designed for younger children or mature adult voices. Freer suggests that adolescent singers are navigating physical and hormonal shifts that directly affect phonation, breath management and resonance. Therefore, warm-ups must be carefully constructed to build vocal stamina and flexibility and to accommodate each singer's evolving range and register stability. These sessions should incorporate a variety of vocalises that gradually develop vocal strength while addressing poise, breath coordination and tone production in a manner that matches the singers' developmental stage.[126]

Setting up a rehearsal venue for adolescent boys undergoing voice changes requires more consideration than a standard setup. As voices shift, it often makes sense to place boys between parts, allowing them to move around the score and sing multiple parts at different times.[127] It is essential that this setup fosters a nurturing environment where some of the older singers can serve as mentors to the younger singers, singing alongside them. When possible, it is a good option to place the boy with the changing voice between the treble and changed tenor and bass parts as warranted. This placement allows the boy to feel a part of the male ensemble within the choir.[128]

A recurring theme in the literature is that successful choral rehearsals foster singer interaction and are not solely conductor centred. Stamer suggests that creating a nurturing environment is essential to having an effective rehearsal with young people where 'choral

[125] Ryan A. Fisher, 'Research-to-Resource: A Choral Director's Abridged Guide to the Male Voice Change', *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 38 (2019), 4.
[126] Freer, 'Choral Warm-Ups', 58.
[127] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 28–29.
[128] Surti, 'Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom', 39–40.

music educators should remember not only to correct errors but also to note improvement and encourage students to continue to improve through positive comments and observable actions during rehearsals'.[129] Reflective questioning, which leads singers to evaluate and analyse their own singing, can help them develop their analytical skills, which in turn gives them more confidence within the choir.[130] Freer maintains that unstructured moments of conversation can be effective in solving musical problems.[131] He argues that directors who allow singers to think for themselves and take responsibility for their own learning are not giving up any of their own power. [132] Allowing moments of unstructured conversation enables students to interact and engage more fully during rehearsal, helping to maintain their interest and foster a collaborative learning environment. Freer argues that it is essential to give praise to students when it is deserved, linking performance success directly to the rehearsal process, so that students can see the connection between the two. Although singers are often expected to learn the music independently before rehearsals, choral educators who provide opportunities for extra help with repertoire learning set their singers up for success.[133] Frank Abrahams advocates for integrating critical pedagogy into teaching practices for young learners. This approach emphasises dialogue between students and teachers, fostering collaborative problem-solving and shared understanding. A central aim of critical pedagogy is to create transformative experiences that engage both educators and students, encouraging personal growth and deeper learning through meaningful interactions.[134] The 'TYPE Pyramid', introduced by

[129] Stamer, 'Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal', 27.
[130] Matthew L. Garrett, 'Teaching for Transfer: Developing Critical Thinking Skills with Adolescent Singers', *Choral Journal*, 54 (2014), 34.
[131] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 51.
[132] Ibid., 53.
[133] Stamer, 'Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal', 29.
[134] Frank Abrahams, 'Changing Voices – Voices of Change: Young Men in Middle School Choirs', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 83.

Naima Wong, Marc Zimmerman and Edith Parker provides the user with an empowerment theoretical framework that advocates for an emphasis on both youth and adult involvement.[135] The pyramid introduces five levels of participation, ranging from total teacher control to total student control, with the ultimate goal of shared responsibility and collaborative control in the rehearsal process. Applied to choir rehearsals with adolescent boys experiencing voice change, the framework emphasises a co-learning relationship between conductor and singers. The conductor provides guidance, structure, and a safe developmental environment while also inviting student voice, collaboration, and increasing musical independence. In practice, this means leading rehearsals in ways that support changing voices while encouraging singers to contribute, build confidence, and develop agency. In this way, adult leadership remains essential but is most effective when it creates youth-centred rehearsal conditions that foster both musical growth and empowerment.[136]

Special attention should be given to pacing and structure in rehearsals to accommodate changing voices. Dilworth proposes that the activity should change every ten to twelve minutes to maintain the singers' interest.[137] Cooper contends that the conductor must be organised and that a chorus programme is contingent on careful lesson planning.[138] He adds that 'at no point in the lesson will the competent choral teacher experience a moment's hesitation as to what comes next'.[139] This is a recurring theme across the literature in this area, where tight lesson planning is recommended to facilitate seamless

[135] Naima T. Wong, Marc A. Zimmerman and Edith A. Parker, 'A Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment for Child and Adolescent Health Promotion', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46 (2010), 104–105.
[136] Ibid., 104–105.
[137] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 32.
[138] Irvin Cooper and Karl O. Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1965), 40.
[139] Cooper and Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music*, 401.

transitions during rehearsals. Freer mentions that adolescents can become weary of the same repertoire if it is repeated over and over again, so it is essential to keep the repertoire fresh and exciting during rehearsal.[140]

Careful consideration is needed for how music is taught to young singers. The challenges presented must be appropriate to the singers in front of the conductor. For motivation, Stamer suggests dividing the music into smaller sections that can be learned separately before performing it in its entirety once learned and using strategies that allow the singers to recognise how the music in the choral rehearsal relates to the broader world.[141] Swanson discovered that using sports analogies to explain key choral skills effectively conveyed the idea that improving these skills would enhance their singing.[142] Just as practising a specific aspect of a sport can improve overall performance, focusing on vocal techniques can lead to better singing. This approach helped singers understand the connection between targeted practice and overall improvement. Matthew Garrett argues that rehearsals should foster critical thinking by helping singers transfer insights from warm-ups to performance and by encouraging them to articulate musical ideas in their own words.[143] Caroline Stupple believes that singers should be given opportunities during rehearsals to analyse the music and discuss musical concepts in their own words. Boys should be given time to share their feelings among themselves to address the unique issues of the male voice, which will help to foster camaraderie and to check in with them on how they are doing.[144]

---

[140] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 52.
[141] Stamer, 'Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal', 29.
[142] Frederick J. Swanson, 'When Voices Change: An Experiment in Junior High School Music', *Music Educators Journal*, 46 (1960), 53.
[143] Garrett, 'Teaching for Transfer', 27.
[144] Caroline M. Stupple, 'The Male Changing Voice: The Student's Experience', *Teaching Music*, 15 (2007), 36.

When working with young singers, a balance must be struck between achieving a successful, valuable and nurturing process and producing a successful product. Performances that result from rich and rewarding rehearsals are more likely to be alive and insightful.[145] It is essential to recognise in these rehearsals that it is not just about having a successful concert, but also about the process of developing and training these young singers for future success. Choir for these developing singers can act as a kind of support group, where the singers' personal experiences of the voice change can be shared with the group, normalising the physical process of change.[146] Leck suggests that good communication will make the singers feel a part of the choir and that an open environment, where the boys can discuss their voice issues during a rehearsal, is important.[147] Such moments can be as inspiring and transformative for a young boy as a concert performance and they should not be overlooked.

3.2.2.2 Repertoire

When choosing repertoire for a choir involving adolescents with changing voices, many of the criteria used to select repertoire remain intact. Durrant offers some planning considerations, including the level of ability of the choir, the balance and strengths of the vocal parts within the choir, contrast within the repertoire, repertoire that will attract and challenge singers, audience preferences, the concert venue and the cost of the music.[148] Any choral director, regardless of the forces at their disposal, can use these considerations as a foundational tool for selecting suitable repertoire for their ensemble. However, when

[145] Wis, *The Conductor as Leader*, 87.
[146] Denison and Denison, 'Uncovering Meaning and Identity through Voice Change', 32.
[147] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 59.
[148] Durrant, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice*, 121.

changing adolescent male voices are involved in the choral forces, standard choral music is often not suitable for their needs. Writing about the importance of the music that is chosen for adolescent males in choir, Anita Collins notes that 'repertoire choice is vital, enough challenge to be interesting but within their technical grasp (especially when their voice is breaking) to guarantee success during performance', adding that 'boys support a high quality of singing performance, whatever the genre of music'.[149] Freer cautions that failing to align developing vocal ranges and tessituras with repertoire choices for young adolescent male singers increases the risk that they will discontinue choir participation.[150]

There are two main approaches to repertoire for boys in voice change: integrate them into the standard choir and shift them among parts to fit their reduced range or isolate them and select repertoire written for cambiata voices that accommodates their changing timbre. Each approach has implications for voice development and ensemble cohesion.[151] The question of providing non-SATB parts for boys stands as one of the greatest current challenges in boys' choral practice.[152] Cooksey mentions that, in choosing repertoire for young singers, well-selected and/or arranged forms form the backbone of the youth choir programme. If the special needs of the changing voice are met, young singers will be more encouraged to stay in the programme and continue lifelong participation in singing'.[153] What makes it even harder is that repertoire selection is totally dependent on the context of the choral forces and the specific nature of the choir that the conductor works with.[154]

---

[149] Anita Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 104.
[150] Freer, 'Singing and Adolescent Males', 4.
[151] Cooper and Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music*, 28.
[152] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 94.
[153] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 70.
[154] Eileen Hower, 'Designing a New Paradigm for Selecting Music for the Middle School Choir', *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 63.

There is no single solution or universal repertoire capable of addressing all challenges, as every choir is unique and may experience varying numbers of young singers undergoing voice changes at any given time. As Cooksey says, 'overall composition of the voice parts will change as the year progresses, with more boys progressing through the various stages'.[155] For example, the choir may consist entirely of boys aged approximately eleven to fourteen. In this case, cambiata-specific repertoire can be used, as it is tailored to accommodate boys who are experiencing voice changes, allowing them to transition smoothly through the different voice parts.[156] For a choir like this, the conductor could choose three-part repertoire based on Cooksey's model.[157] The unchanged boys could sing a treble part, the middle boys a cambiata I part and the lower singers a cambiata II/developing baritone part. However, in other choral contexts, the boys may need to be singing SSA music in a choir alongside the girls. Once their voices begin to lower, they may need to move into a youth choir SATB setting, where their voices may not yet be developed enough to sing one of those parts specifically. Choosing a standard SATB repertoire in this case may not be appropriate for developing boys and the conductor may need to take this into account when selecting the choir's repertoire. Freer highlights how repertoire can provide the material through which students develop skills that improve their enjoyment of choral singing.[158] He advocates for careful consideration of the level of challenge of repertoire, noting that an appropriate selection will highlight to students how they are developing and provide them with greater confidence in their own skills.[159]

[155] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 28.
[156] Phillip H. Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper (1900-1971) and the Development of the Cambiata Concept for Adolescent Changing Voices', *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 37 (2015), 78.
[157] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 27.
[158] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 52.
[159] Ibid., 53.

When there are not enough tenors and basses for SATB, conductors often use SAB, amalgamating the tenor and bass parts into a single line to create a balanced three-part choir. Emily Crocker suggests that SAB music can be used effectively once the male voices have changed, but if used too early, she argues that it is just SATB without the T and thus can leave a wide gap between the alto and baritone parts.[160] Leck mentions that quite often in SAB music, the easiest part of the melody is given to the sopranos and altos, who are not going through as dramatic a voice change as the boys. Boys are often given a part in their upper range that they struggle to hear. He recommends using music with a cambiata part, written or using simpler two- or three-part treble parts where the boys can sing an octave lower.[161] He adds that 'a creative teacher can mould a two or three-part piece to fit the most comfortable range of their singers'.[162] If there is an SAB and SSA arrangement of the same piece, Sweet recommends checking out the SSA version, as it may work better with changing voices than the SAB.[163] Judy Bowers highlights that a collapsed range alto part is appropriate for the boys in that alto/tenor range, but warns that the girl alto singers should not be stuck singing this small range. To accommodate this, she recommends using SSA and SSAA music and revoicing it for SATB singers.[164] Ashley contends that much of the repertoire published for children in recent decades is pitched too low and that choosing repertoire that has a higher pitch centre will help the process of the singers using their whole voice.[165] Sweet advises that songs with independent parts work well with changing voices, as when the parts are different enough from each other, it is much easier to keep a line and they are less likely

[160] Emily Crocker, 'Choosing Music for Middle School Choirs', *Music Educators Journal*, 86 (2000), 36.
[161] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 56.
[162] Ibid., 57.
[163] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 189.
[164] Judy Bowers, 'Structuring Successes in Beginning Middle School Choral Ensembles', in Frank Abrahms (ed.), *Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2011), 62.
[165] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 37–38.

to get lost into the other vocal parts.[166] Fischer suggests that conductors should be alert to choral music that has the boys singing overly-long, sustained phrases or sustained pitches that could be laborious for them.[167] Williams recommends that adolescent boys need guidance through the new repertoire and that, while they may want to exploit their new 'manly tones', forcing this sound is not to be recommended.[168]

Writing for young voices takes great skill and consideration. Guidelines on how to write for young voices can serve composers writing for young voices and can be helpful for conductors in selecting suitable repertoire. However, these examples are few and difficult to access. Cooksey referred to a set of guidelines by Leonord Van Camp (Director of Choral Activities at Southern Illinois University) for composers and arrangers to improve their writing for young voices.[169] In Cooksey's summary of the document, he claims that it urges composers to write music for young changing voices should be deliberately practical and pedagogically appropriate, keeping parts simple and within comfortable ranges.[170] He claims that the guidelines recommend tailoring material to individual development, writing clearly and viewing each arrangement as an experiment that may need revision in order to maximise learnability of the repertoire and ensure the vocal health and musical engagement of the singers.[171] Though this is crucial information for composers and conductors who are commissioning new works, guidelines like these are not readily accessible.

[166] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 188.
[167] Fisher, 'Research-to-Resource', 7.
[168] Williams, *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults*, 72.
[169] Cooksey, *Working with Adolescent Voices*, 70.
[170] Ibid., 70.
[171] Ibid., 70.

Some composers write create music that is specifically written for boys' choirs. These cambiata choirs use music that is tailored to the vocal needs of the boys. Often in this case, instead of writing traditional SATB or SSA repertoire, some composers write music that includes one or two cambiata lines (C) and an emerging baritone line (B) so, in terms of voicing, SCB or CCB. The unchanged voices sing the top line, which is a treble line. The lowest part is written for an emerging baritone, which usually acts as a mid-range bass line, well within the range of most boys whose voices are settling after the majority of voice change has taken place. The middle part acts as a cambiata part, specifically designed for boys whose voices are changing. This part tends to be voiced between the tenor and alto part and has a limited range.[172] The Cambiata Press, a publishing company founded by Don Collins, came from his desire to spread the teachings of the cambiata concept. This company began publishing music written specifically for adolescent voices, employing composers to create music that accommodated their vocal limitations.[173] Since then, other publishing companies have released choral music series that offer selections of music that consider adolescent voices, including Oxford University Press's *Emerging Voices Series*, Novello Press's *Changing Voices* and Alfred's *The Cambiata Collection*. However, financial constraints may impede the flourishing of publications specifically for changing voices.

3.2.3 The people

Guiding adolescent boys through voice change requires more than technique; conductors must be role models, motivators and empathetic listeners, modelling healthy vocal practice, demonstrating respect and resilience, building trust and creating a safe, inclusive

[172] Stockton, 'Irvin Cooper', 83.
[173] Don Collins, 'The Cambiata Concept: More than Just about Changing Voices', *Choral Journal*, 23 (1982), 5.

environment where each boy can grow musically. Leadership, care and relational skills are as essential as musical expertise. This section is organised under three headings: the conductor as role model, as motivator and as empathiser.

3.2.3.1 The role model

As mentors, conductors are role models who shape character and habits; their on- and off-podium behaviour communicates values like respect, responsibility, perseverance and teamwork. By modelling positive leadership, they help boys to grow as musicians and as confident, considerate young men, while keeping them engaged and focused. Ashley has done much research into the area of the relationship between conductors and their young male singers, notably gathering boys' views on this matter. One of his key findings is that the boys believe that a good teacher should be able to control them in the choral rehearsal. They should be able to have a bit of fun, but know how to restore order once the joke is over.[174] The students he surveyed also added that teachers should always be fair in their dealings with them and be able to keep confidences.[175] According to Armstrong and Armstrong, effective transformational leadership involves engaging musicians so that everyone benefits and the group elevates its performance and insight. Such a leader is energetic, can share a clear future direction and demonstrates through actions while reinforcing progress with positive feedback.[176] They suggest that providing good modelling for the singers is important.

Collins notes that teachers can serve as a 'stationary pillar' during this shifting time and she emphasises the importance of staff retention in maintaining a positive music

[174] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 107.
[175] Ibid., 107.
[176] Armstrong and Armstrong, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', 25.

programme so that boys can build long-lasting and trustworthy relationships with these staff members.[177] Freer discusses how, when directors and young singers are in an environment where they can interact as fellow musicians, rather than in the more traditional teacher–student relationship, they can feel more empowered.[178] Freer also notes that when a boy tells the teacher he plans to withdraw from the choir, the teacher's response can determine whether he will return to singing in the choir in the future.[179] Cooper suggests that it is essential for the conductor not to have favourite students in the ensemble and to avoid being too casual when dealing with them. He also suggests that it is essential to never get angry or show temper in front of them.[180] Sweet highlights perception as being one of the most important components of voice change. She suggests that many adolescents leave singing out of shame or embarrassment about their own voice and that educators need to model this perseverance.[181] Abrahams suggests that children's attitudes and beliefs are shaped by the behaviours of same-sex role models and that, if it is not possible to have a male conductor, then bringing in other males may be of great benefit.[182] Similarly, Collins also notes that praise coming from a male role model, as opposed to a parent, can have a significantly greater impact.[183] She encourages the choir masters to consider bringing in other male figures such as fathers and guardians, to engage with the singers during rehearsals, provide feedback and offer support to the boys.[184] From the literature, it is clear that boys require strong role models to maintain

[177] Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', 99.
[178] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 53.
[179] Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys', 11.
[180] Cooper and Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music*, 410.
[181] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 64.
[182] Abrahams, 'Changing Voices – Voices of Change', 84.
[183] Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', 101.
[184] Ibid., 105.

their interest in choir and that everything these role models say and do must be carefully thought through and managed in order to establish that singing is for men.[185]

Sport can influence boys' involvement in choir. There are opportunities to excel in both choir and sport, so how the conductor responds to the effect of sport on participation is crucial. Freer suggests incorporating physical activities that are sports and activity-inspired into the rehearsal. These can be things such as throwing a football or weight lifting.[186] Cooper also emphasised the importance of understanding what sports are popular within a school setting and attending sporting events when possible to show your support for them.[187] Dilworth offers a number of vocal concepts, along with sports analogies, that can be used with young singers to provide a visual aid for developing their voices and relating them to an activity they are familiar with.[188] He also wrote a vocal exercise named *Playing Sports*, which encourages singers to assign sports-like activities and actions to it in order to achieve different sounds.[189] One of the biggest challenges that choral directors face in relation to sport is the idea that puberty tends to make boys stronger and better at sport. They receive a lot of praise from their coaches as they become more proficient at the game. On the other hand, there may be a perception among boys that their voices are changing during puberty, which, unfortunately, can lead them to choose sports over music. Linking shared language between both disciplines can help with the transition.

3.2.3.2 The motivator

[185] White and White, 'Commonsense Training for Changing Male Voice', 42.
[186] Freer, 'Choral Warm-ups', 60.
[187] Cooper and Kuersteiner, *Teaching Junior High School Music*, 411.
[188] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 30.
[189] Ibid., 30.

Motivating adolescent male singers through voice change requires a research-informed approach that accounts for individual development while sustaining musical engagement and healthy vocal practice. This section shows how teachers balance high artistic standards with individualised support as timbres, ranges and breath control evolve, arguing that genuine motivation comes from integrating key topics such as anatomy and physiology, pedagogy for developing ranges, resonance and breath management, vocal health, feedback, repertoire and psychosocial factors, into coherent practice.

Collins suggests that in order to motivate boys to remain engaged in their musical activities, the conductor has to have a 'firm understanding of boys' educational psychology in the areas of school culture, teaching practice and curriculum design'.[190] She also indicates that if interactions that are positive in a healthy ecosystem surround the boy, the boy will thrive.[191] Dilworth offers some suggestions on how to motivate adolescent singers. These include creating a safe, trusting space that fosters independence, upholds high standards and structure, communicates honestly, uses positive reinforcement, promotes singing as a worthwhile and healthy activity, maintains open lines of communication and facilitates smooth rehearsals by switching activities every ten to twelve minutes.[192] Freer suggests that adolescent boys undergoing voice change primarily value two elements of the choral music experience: personal vocal skill development and social relationships.[193] Therefore, to motivate young adolescent singers undergoing voice change, these two elements must be consistently incorporated into their rehearsals. Leck believes that it is crucial to build confidence by building trust with the

[190] Collins, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', 98.
[191] Anita Collins, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', in Scott Harrison (ed.), *Male Voices: Stories of Boys Learning through Making Music* (Camberwell: ACER Press, 2009), 38.
[192] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 31–32.
[193] Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys', 11.

students. To motivate the students, they must be assigned music and a voice part that falls within their most comfortable range.[194] Ashley describes the key to motivating adolescent boys as relying on both the conductor's expertise and their relationship with the singers.[195] According to him, technical competencies are not enough; conductors must be able to connect and engage with them to support their development.

For adolescent boys to remain motivated, it is essential that the goals set are realistic and achievable for them. If the group is new, it might be a good idea to start with upbeat, fun pieces that will impress an audience. Surti offers suggestions to motivate singers to remain in the school choir, including offering solo opportunities, spotlighting male singers and their diverse talents, involving other musical abilities (guitar, drums, etc.), encouraging students to create their own arrangements, inviting a male staff member (or two) to sing along.[196] Apfelstadt's 'Five Commandments of Choral Leadership' asks conductors to challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way and encourage from the heart, aligning with much of the literature on boy's changing voices, where the boys are at the centre of all considerations.[197]

3.2.3.3 The empathiser

Empathy from the conductor is essential as boys navigate puberty-driven voice change. With rapid physical and social changes, patient, nonjudgmental listening and sensitive communication create a safe space to explore evolving timbres and ranges, supporting motivation, trust and healthy musical growth. Support also extends beyond the voice to

[194] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 57.
[195] Ashley, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys*, 102.
[196] Surti, 'Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom', 40.
[197] Allen and Apfelstadt, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', 31.

the boys' broader physical, social and emotional development within the choir. Dilworth highlights the need for the conductor to be aware of the emotional dimensions associated with voice change. Although every young singer will go through a different path, general knowledge on the topic will be useful to plan successful rehearsals.[198] Freer highlights the crucial transition from primary to secondary school. Some adolescents enter secondary education with a solid foundation in choral music, while others arrive with varying levels of preparation. In secondary schools, teachers must address the diverse needs of a broader range of students, a challenge intensified by the voice-change process.[199] Freer also emphasises that the conductor must be aware of boys who are temporarily unable to phonate and that this information should be conveyed to them within a safe classroom environment, so the other students will understand that empathy is required in this situation.[200] Leck stresses that 'in order to succeed, teachers need to understand how the boys may be feeling, where they sing comfortably and exercise patience'.[201] Ashley argues that the teacher's attitude and values play a more important and pivotal role in boys' vocal development than classroom management or knowledge of the changing voice.[202] Sweet highlights that while it can be frustrating to work with students going through voice change and their vocal limitations, conductors must never forget that it is out of their control and it is the job of conductors to empower them to navigate their vocal challenges.[203] Collins suggests that boys, more than girls, rely on positive relationships over their educational environment. Boys respond to a teacher who is genuinely interested in them and can easily relate to them.[204]

---

[198] Dilworth, 'Working with Male Adolescent Voices', 24.
[199] Freer, 'Adapt, Build and Challenge', 49.
[200] Freer, 'The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys', 13.
[201] Leck, 'The Boy's ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice', 52.
[202] Martin Ashley, *Singing in the Lower Secondary School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 187.
[203] Sweet, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box*, 63.
[204] Collins, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', 43.

3.3 Survey of the training landscape

Training opportunities for choir conductors working with adolescent boys experiencing voice changes are extremely limited, both in Ireland and internationally. This topic is rarely included in formal music or music education programmes, leaving a significant gap in professional development for conductors. In Ireland, the Irish Primary School Curriculum (1999), the new Junior Cycle Music Syllabus that was introduced into schools in 2018 and the Leaving Certificate Music Syllabus (1996) do not address issues related to adolescent voice change.[205] Using available handbooks and module descriptors, it does not seem that undergraduate music and music education degrees and postgraduate programmes in choral conducting and music education in Ireland offer dedicated modules or practical training related to adolescent changing voices.

A review of professional training for choral conductors in Ireland confirms this gap. Sing Ireland runs an annual International Choral Conducting Summer School offering multi-level courses in conducting, interpretation and vocal pedagogy.[206] While there is a strand curated for music educators of children and young people, the course description does not mention specifically working with adolescent boys. The Post Primary Music Teachers Association (PPMTA) organises teacher training events, mainly through its annual conference, but a review of current and past conference schedules confirms that adolescent voice change has not been addressed.[207]

[205] Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum: Music* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999); National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Junior Cycle Music* (Dublin: An Roinn Oideachais/Department of Education, 2017); An Roinn Oideachais/ Department of Education, *Leaving Certificate Music Syllabus: Higher and Ordinary Level Courses* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1996)
[206] See Sing Ireland's website for more information on the course <https://singireland.ie/participation/irish-choral-conducting-summer-school> [accessed 20 September 2025].
[207] See the website for the 2025 conference schedule < http://ppmta.ie/?page_id=50 [accessed 20 September 2025]. Previous schedules were accessed as hard copies.

Much of the existing training in this area is practitioner-led and takes the form of short workshops or seminars. These are often introductory in nature, providing an overview rather than in-depth guidance for conductors. For example, an online talk given by Freer through the Voice Study Centre was classified as a short course and offered a two-hour overview of key issues in working with adolescent boys.[208] The advertisement claimed that it would present highlights from new research that would 'ground a discussion of what teachers can do to keep boys enrolled in choral singing during adolescence, facilitate the return to choral singing by boys who withdraw and develop active and successful recruitment/retention strategies for different types of schools and choral situations'.[209] Topics covered included anatomy, the six stages of voice maturation, insights from interviews, ten key developmental facts and reasons boys may withdraw from singing or choral activities.[210] It served as an accessible two-hour introduction for a general audience of vocal pedagogues and, while informative, this session was brief and did not overtly focus on the choral context.

Other webinars and courses are offered sporadically by experts such as Ashley and Williams. Williams offers courses on teaching young voices, including changing voices, designed for individuals with little or no prior experience.[211] Williams has also written a popular book, which offers extensive advice on teaching singing to young singers. This,

[208] Voice Study Centre, 'Patrick Freer, "Thirty Years of Interviews with Adolescent Boys: Why They Sing and Why They Don't"' <https://voicestudycentre.com/short-courses/thirty-years-of-interviews-with-adolescent-boys-why-they-sing-why-they-dont-with-patrick-k-freer/> [accessed 18 September 2025].
[209] Voice Study Centre, 'Patrick Freer, "Thirty Years of Interviews with Adolescent Boys: Why They Sing and Why They Don't"' <https://voicestudycentre.com/short-courses/thirty-years-of-interviews-with-adolescent-boys-why-they-sing-why-they-dont-with-patrick-k-freer/> [accessed 18 September 2025].
[210] Patrick Freer, 'Thirty Years of Interviews with Adolescent Boys: Why They Sing and Why They Don't' (Online Webinar, Voice Study Centre, 16 January 2025).
[211] For information on upcoming courses, see Jenevora Williams, 'Evolving Voice' <https://www.evolvingvoice.co.uk/course-teaching-young-voices.htm> [accessed 6 September 2025].

however, does not focus on choral music education and appears to be aimed at educating one-to-one singing teachers.[212] Organisations such as the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD) and the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) have included sessions on adolescent voice change at conferences and through their online webinar series, but these are not part of any structured training pathway.[213]

Overall, the training landscape highlights a clear lack of systematic, accessible and comprehensive programmes for conductors wishing to develop expertise in working with adolescent boys during voice change. It appears that the classification of the voice and descriptions of vocal anatomy are the most popular topics when this area is addressed. As a result, much of the knowledge for choral contexts remains practitioner-driven and reliant on informal learning. This gap directly informs the focus of the design of this present research. By gathering detailed insights from expert conductors who have practical experience with adolescent boys' changing voices, this study seeks to identify the specific competencies, strategies and approaches that could form the basis of a structured framework for conducting in this context. In doing so, the research aims to contribute evidence-based guidance to an area where formal training is currently limited or absent, particularly in relation to the Irish choral context.

3.4 Foundations of an emerging framework

This chapter has outlined three interconnected bodies of knowledge: the various models and frameworks that conceptualise choral conducting; the specialist literature on working

[212] Williams, *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults*.
[213] See the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) website for the schedules from previous conferences and conventions <https://acda.org/archives/events> [accessed 24 September 2025]; See the Association of British Choral Directors (ABCD) webinar library for online recorded sessions <https://abcd.org.uk/resources/online-resources-to-purchase/> [accessed 24 September 2025]. In particular, see 'Building Voices: The Future Needs YOU! with Professor Martin Ashley and Guest Panel' and 'Building Voices: Two Sides of the Atlantic with Prof. Martin Ashley and Patrick Freer'.

with adolescent boys experiencing voice change; and the current training landscape available to conductors wishing to improve their practice with changing voices. Considered together, these strands provide foundations that can inform the development of an emerging framework for conducting choirs of adolescent boys. This section synthesises these insights, identifying the initial categories that will later guide the analysis of interview data.

Across the literature on conducting models and frameworks, three broad domains consistently emerge as central to professional practice: conductor approaches and philosophies, conductor competencies and contextual considerations. Conductor approaches and philosophies chart the emergence of the character and principal-led ethic underpinning effective conducting. Conductor competencies comprises three main groups of considerations: musical and technical competencies; interpersonal competencies; and pedagogical competencies. The contextual dimension adds further complexity to these approaches and competencies. Conductors do not operate in isolation; their work is shaped by situational demands, socio-cultural environments and the developmental characteristics of their singers.

The literature on conducting adolescent changing voices further reinforces the importance of these domains. It highlights key characteristics and principles embodied by conductors working in this context, including the conductor as role model, motivator and empathiser. Much of the literature was concerned with the musical-technical components specific to voice change. It also looked at the interpersonal skills on display by conductors. Pedagogical considerations are often highlighted, particularly concerning rehearsal techniques and repertoire selection. Contextual factors lie at the centre of this body of

work, as the experiences of adolescent boys' choirs are inherently situational, socially and culturally specific and shaped by the individual variability of singers' physical and socio-emotional changeability.

The survey of the training landscape reveals a marked lack of structured or specialist training that addresses this intersection of conducting and adolescent voice change. While general conducting courses tend to emphasise musical-technical development and occasional workshops address elements of adolescent vocal pedagogy, there is no coherent provision that integrates the full range of competencies and contextual understanding required. This gap underscores the need for a framework that brings together knowledge from conducting pedagogy, adolescent vocal development and practitioner expertise in a clear way.

Together, the insights from the literature and the training landscape suggest several initial conceptual categories that may serve as valuable foundations for an emerging framework:

1. Conductor approaches and philosophies: the overarching characteristics, dispositions and leadership principles required of conductors working with adolescent boys.
2. Conductor competencies: including musical and technical competencies, interpersonal competencies and pedagogical competencies
3. Contextual considerations: comprising situational factors, socio-cultural contexts and singer-specific considerations

These categories establish the conceptual foundations upon which the next stages of the research will build. The preliminary themes identified here will inform the coding system

used in the thematic analysis of interview data in the next chapter. Through practitioners' perspectives, these initial categories will be tested, refined, expanded or challenged, ultimately contributing to the development of a more comprehensive and contextually grounded framework in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four

Insights from Practitioners

4.1 Description of interview participants

Following the development of the initial conceptual categories, interview participants were sought to provide practitioner perspectives that could inform the refinement of the framework. Ten conductors who work regularly in Ireland and Northern Ireland with adolescent boys experiencing voice change were invited to participate in interviews about their practice. The purpose of these interviews was to document current approaches, challenges and expertise among conductors working with this age group and to then use these insights to iterate and strengthen the emerging framework. All invited conductors agreed to take part.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy designed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences. Conductors were drawn from diverse professional contexts, including post-primary school choirs, youth choirs and choral music education programmes and national ensembles involving adolescent boys. Some participants lead their own choral music education programmes, providing opportunities for singers to progress through multiple ensembles or developmental stages. A mix of male and female conductors was sought in order to incorporate the perspectives of both male and female conductors supporting boys through voice change.

To ensure confidentiality, each participant has been anonymised and assigned a pseudonym. Where possible, identifying details have been removed. Table 4.1

summarises the professional contexts of each of the conductors based on relevant information provided during the interviews.

Table 4.1 Description of the interview participants' relevant professional contexts

Pseudonym	**Gender**	**Relevant professional context(s)**
Andrew	Male	All-boys secondary school choir
Brenda	Female	Liturgical church choir of young male singers Youth choir that includes young male singers
Colin	Male	Youth choral music education programme that includes young male singers
David	Male	School choir that includes young male singers Youth choir that includes young male singers
Eoin	Male	Youth choral music education programme that includes young male singers
Fiona	Female	Youth choral music education programmes that include young male singers National youth choir that includes young male singers
Geraldine	Female	Youth choirs that include young male singers
Harry	Male	Youth choral music education programme that includes young male singers
Ian	Male	Youth choral music education programmes that include young male singers National youth choir that includes young male singers
Jenna	Female	All-boys secondary school choir

4.2 Insights from practitioners

4.2.1 Musical and technical competencies

The conductors referred to a range of specialised knowledge, decision-making and practical skills needed to support healthy, effective singing during voice change. The

most common competencies cited were: understanding the changing voice; knowing, selecting and adapting repertoire; and assigning voice parts.

4.2.1.1 Understanding the changing voice

A clear understanding of the adolescent male changing voice emerged from the interviews as one of the most fundamental musical and technical competencies required of conductors. Participants repeatedly emphasised that knowledge of range, tessitura and the progression of change is essential for making musically responsible decisions about repertoire and voice part assignment. Eoin emphasises that successful voice assignment depends on 'treating the instrument as according to where it's at', underscoring the necessity of conductor expertise and responsiveness.[1] Ian encapsulated this need for specialist expertise, noting that conductors must have 'a solid grounding in understanding the voice and how the voice works as a skill in order to help that young person during that period'.[2] His comment highlights the broader implication that without a technical understanding of voice change, conductors cannot reliably select, adapt or deliver music and vocal instruction that supports healthy development.

Several conductors highlighted the unpredictability of boys' voices. Many observed that vocal capacity may shift not only over months but from rehearsal to rehearsal, requiring the conductor to reassess technical demands constantly. In addition to understanding limits, conductors must recognise key developmental transitions, such as the loss of head voice and the emergence of falsetto. Brenda noted that once voices change, boys 'don't have head voice' in the same way, a technical insight that can inform how conductors

[1] Appendix H, 306.
[2] Appendix L, 378.

interact with the singers as these registration shifts have direct implications for tessitura, voice placement and long-term development.[3] These examples of real-life challenges for conductors situate vocal knowledge as a competency rooted in responsiveness and real-time evaluation.

Participants also stressed the importance of recognising signs of vocal strain and understanding the physiological boundaries within which adolescent singers can work safely. David articulated this succinctly, explaining that 'any sense of strain from around the larynx and the neck is just avoided', underscoring the expectation that conductors must identify when technical demands exceed healthy limits.[4] This technical vigilance is also evident in Ian's willingness to alter lines, prioritising 'the physical safety of the child over a composer's original score'.[5] Such decisions require judgment grounded in deep knowledge of the changing instruments with which the conductors are working.

A further dimension of technical competency relating to vocal understanding involves professional self-awareness. Fiona articulated her caution about discussing vocal anatomy in too much detail, noting that without specialist training she could potentially 'do some harm or to bring, you know, misinformation'.[6] Her comments highlight that technical competency in this area includes understanding the boundaries of one's own expertise and recognising when additional support from vocal coaches or specialists may be required. This support may involve consulting a knowledgeable singing teacher to help the young singer develop vocal freedom and avoid strain. In cases where a singer

[3] Appendix E, 225.
[4] Appendix G, 278.
[5] Appendix L, 379.
[6] Appendix I, 322.

experiences pain, possible structural vocal issues, infection, muscular tension, or a combination of concerns, referral to a vocal health specialist may be appropriate. In more serious cases, the singer may be advised to seek assessment from an ear, nose and throat specialist. This self-awareness is itself a form of technical competency when working with developing voices.

These perspectives point to a shared understanding across the conductors that vocal developmental knowledge is the foundation of much of the decision-making in adolescent male choirs. It enables conductors to select or adapt repertoire based on realistic technical demands, recognise the signs of strain and intervene musically, manage the fluidity and unpredictability of changing voices and maintain artistic integrity while prioritising vocal health. In this sense, understanding the changing voice is the central musical–technical competency that allows conductors to make safe, effective and artistically-informed decisions for adolescent male singers. Despite this sentiment being shared by all interview participants, however, it is notable that the practitioners rarely referred to their use of vocal classification systems or demonstrated their knowledge of any of research the on this topic.

4.2.1.2 Knowing, selecting and adapting repertoire

Across the interviews, conductors described repertoire selection as a core musical and technical competency, utilising the nuanced knowledge of adolescent male voices, while also employing skilful musical judgement and an ability to evaluate and adapt scores according to technical demands. Rather than treating programming as a purely artistic choice, conductors approached the choosing of repertoire as a central site of musical

decision-making that directly shapes vocal development, supports healthy technique and ensures that the music aligns with the physiological realities of changing voices.

For Andrew, the process begins with understanding the ensemble's musical and developmental profile and selecting works that fit the singers' current technical capacity while also engaging their musical interests.[7] He notes that adolescent male singers often respond strongly to sentimental pieces but also enjoy rhythmically driven music that channels their energy. Other conductors stressed the importance of avoiding assumptions about boys' musical preferences. Geraldine observes that pieces initially assumed to be unpopular were often embraced, highlighting the importance of offering diverse musical experiences that extend beyond expected styles.[8] Eoin also believes that how singers engage with the piece, for example, by integrating movement or physicality, can enable embodied, meaningful engagement regardless of the genre.[9] Further, several conductors noted that their own musical connection to a piece influences its effectiveness as music that excites the conductor tends to inspire the choir, demonstrating the role of conductor engagement as part of the musical and technical decisions.

A second major theme concerned the role of repertoire in supporting healthy and sustainable vocal development. Conductors consistently evaluated range, tessitura, voice leading and textural balance through a technical lens. Colin selects repertoire based on 'what I have in front of me', recognising the variability of adolescent voices and ensuring that chosen works challenge without straining.[10] David similarly values well-designed

[7] Appendix D, 198.
[8] Appendix J, 339.
[9] Appendix H, 306.
[10] Appendix F, 245.

voice leading that facilitates safe development of technical skills and his willingness to let basses explore emerging lower notes reflects a musically-informed decision.[11] By contrast, Fiona adopts a more conservative technical approach, avoiding overly low bass writing and minimising divisions in sections to keep the ensemble secure and confident. She also emphasises selecting repertoire that can flexibly accommodate vocal changes over the year.[12] Jenna evaluates repertoire for sustainability, excluding works that overextend young tenors.[13] Harry prioritises range as the key criterion, preferring three- or four-part cambiata voicings that align with developmental stages.[14] Geraldine uses SAB settings strategically to maintain musical integrity when tenor and bass numbers fluctuate.[15] Ian exemplifies technical adaptability by altering notes when necessary to prioritise vocal safety over strict fidelity to the score.[16] Brenda selects repertoire with diverse timbres, languages and extended techniques to expand tonal imagination and technical versatility.[17] These perspectives demonstrate that repertoire selection is a highly specialised competency. The conductors' decisions reflect a blend of technical understanding of voice change, score analysis, adaptability and artistic judgement. Effective repertoire selection enables conductors to match technical demands with developing voices, manage the shifting balance of voice parts and provide musically stimulating challenges that remain within healthy limits. It is therefore a foundational competency in working with adolescent male singers and one that underpins not only vocal and musical growth but also each singer's long-term engagement and artistic development. However, there is no decisive approach to this among the conductors and,

[11] Appendix G, 272.
[12] Appendix I, 321.
[13] Appendix M, 397.
[14] Appendix K, 365.
[15] Appendix J, 338.
[16] Appendix L, 379.
[17] Appendix E, 204.

as demonstrated, there are often conflicting views about the best repertoire for this age group, despite the literature preferencing certain approaches in some cases.

4.2.1.3 Assigning voice parts

Assigning voice parts was frequently cited in the interviews as an important competency for conductors working with adolescent male singers. Andrew described a hands-on approach, sitting at the piano with the boys and having them sing scales while visualising where they are on the stave, which allows them to locate themselves precisely within the choir.[18] Brenda begins each year by checking the range of the boys, listening carefully and asking which part of their voice feels most comfortable.[19] She values their own sense of their voice, allowing self-assessment to guide placement unless she feels that they have assigned themselves to an incorrect part. These approaches highlights the importance of fostering agency within the singers while ensuring expert oversight.

Colin typically starts changing voices in the tenor section, adapting as needed when pieces or individual voices require flexibility.[20] David prefers not to over-label voices, giving them opportunities to sing both the alto and tenor lines as their voices change.[21] Geraldine described a gradual approach, allowing all boys to sing together initially and observing who excels in higher or lower ranges, enabling informed placement over time.[22] Ian highlighted the need for immediate adjustments when voices change, framing part reassignment as a learning opportunity and a means to enhance musical education even if the singers are in the middle of learning a piece.[23] Jenna stressed the importance

[18] Appendix D, 190.
[19] Appendix E, 223.
[20] Appendix F, 248.
[21] Appendix G, 261–262.
[22] Appendix J, 340.
[23] Appendix L, 381.

of regular range checks and listening to singers' feedback, noting that while this may temporarily create unbalanced sections, the priority is supporting the individual's vocal development rather than achieving an ideal choral texture.[24]

Across these accounts, assigning voice parts emerges as a responsive practice. Conductors must balance musical goals with individual vocal development, maintain flexibility in response to changing voices and foster singers' self-awareness. This competency requires both technical knowledge of voice ranges and an understanding of adolescent male vocal development and how repertoire can support this, underpinned by attentiveness to the changing needs and experiences of each singer.

4.2.2 Pedagogical competencies

The participants spoke in depth about the conductor's ability to teach effectively, structure learning, diagnose needs and respond developmentally to the changing voice. The most prevalent competencies spoken about were: teaching about vocal technique and the developing voice; planning and structuring rehearsals; and providing differentiated and individualised teaching.

4.2.2.1 Teaching about vocal technique and the developing voice

Teaching vocal technique to adolescent male singers emerged as a highly nuanced pedagogical task, requiring sensitivity to developmental change, attention to vocal health and the use of clear, age-appropriate communication. Participants consistently

[24] Appendix M, 406.

emphasised that teaching technique to this age group requires the ability to translate technical ideas into accessible and confidence-building learning experiences rather than providing an expert-level anatomical explanation, even though conductors themselves need to understand the processes in great detail.

A strong theme across the interviews was the importance of helping boys access their voices safely while providing enough guidance to foster independent, confident singers. Andrew prioritises practical, experience-based strategies, describing his approach as getting boys 'to try and use their voice in a way that they can sing the notes that are written for them as effectively as possible'.[25] Humming exercises, for example, are used to develop a resonant tone without requiring technical explanation. Similarly, Geraldine frames technique through the body, encouraging boys to notice natural sensations such as a cough or sneeze as a way of understanding breath and vocal production.[26] In both cases, technique is conveyed through embodied experiences**,** allowing boys to learn by doing rather than through abstract instruction.

A recurring theme across participants was the avoidance of overloading boys with technical terminology. Fiona emphasises that without the lens of a vocal scientist, explaining anatomy in detail could be harmful.[27] Jenna concurs, noting that adolescent boys 'don't need to be overloaded with technical terminology' and instead benefit from instruction grounded in somatic experience.[28] Even Ian, who introduces basic anatomical concepts such as how the folds meet, does so sparingly, ensuring that technical

[25] Appendix D, 203.
[26] Appendix J, 343.
[27] Appendix I, 321–322.
[28] Appendix M, 407.

explanations are always connected to practical singing outcomes.[29] Other conductors also adopt an explicit approach while still grounding teaching in accessible language. Brenda incorporates movement into warm-ups, guiding boys to feel 'length' and 'space' as part of vocal production and then clarifies the distinction between head voice and falsetto once voices change.[30] In addition to his practical instruction, David encourages boys to explore a wide range of technical information, selectively integrating guidance from workshops or other conductors.[31] This approach reflects a balance between experiential learning and informed awareness**,** allowing singers to engage with technical ideas while experiencing the sensation of their voices.

Conductors also described navigating the pedagogical tension between encouraging exploration and protecting the developing instrument. David encourages his emerging basses to explore lower and says 'I don't mind them exploring that part of the voice',[32] while Ian, consistent with Fiona's approach, tends to adopt a more cautious stance with voices that are less stable.[33] This divergence reflects an important pedagogical truth: effective teaching of vocal technique in this context depends on the conductor's ability to read the needs and capacities of each individual singer and to tailor instruction accordingly. This, therefore, is a balance that the interviewees appear to negotiate according to the needs and capabilities of the singers in front of them. However, much like repertoire choices, the literature on vocal pedagogy for changing voices outlines certain best practices.

[29] Appendix L, 383.
[30] Appendix E, 225.
[31] Appendix G, 280.
[32] Appendix G, 271.
[33] Appendix L, 376.

These approaches suggest that teaching adolescent males' vocal technique is not just about imparting technical knowledge but also about facilitating discovery, building confidence and promoting vocal health. Conductors' strategies, whether through embodied exercises, selective explanation or guided range explorations, demonstrate a responsive and developmental way of teaching. Effective pedagogical practice in this context is inherently adaptive; conductors read the needs of each singer, scaffold techniques according to developmental stages and create conditions for boys to learn safely while feeling capable and engaged.

4.2.2.2 Planning and structuring rehearsals

Across the interviews, conductors described rehearsal planning as a deliberate and highly responsive process shaped by the developmental needs of adolescent male singers, the musical goals of the ensemble and the social dynamics of the group. Although their methods varied, a shared belief emerged, understanding that effective rehearsals require structure, clarity and purposeful pacing, while remaining flexible enough to respond to the variable energy, concentration and vocal development of the boys in front of them.

Several conductors emphasised the importance of providing a clear rehearsal structure. Eoin believes it is important to 'present challenges to them, but your responsibility, my responsibility as a director is absolutely thorough preparation', while also practising flexibility when needed, thus taking a professional and organised approach.[34] Conductors similarly underscored the importance of sequencing and pacing. For Geraldine, structure is tied to developmental pacing as she consciously balances the time spent on each task so that rehearsals feel purposeful rather than overwhelming, ensuring that boys experience

[34] Appendix H, 296.

steady progress without becoming tired.[35] Jenna spoke about 'creating an environment that feels safe and comfortable for them to explore' and 'of working hard towards that kind of shared goal'.[36] These comments all reflect an understanding that boys benefit from rehearsals that move forward at an appropriate tempo, that neither creates frustration by moving too fast nor allows for disengagement because of moving too slowly.

Conductors also stressed the importance of flexibility and adaptive decision-making during rehearsals. Brenda was particularly explicit about the need to be flexible within planned structures, not only to adjust for vocal changes but also to respond to boys' emotional states and group energy.[37] Eoin described rehearsals as dynamic spaces where the conductor continually assesses what the group needs next, shifting strategies if the plan no longer supports learning.[38] One strategy used by several conductors to change the energy within a rehearsal is to regularly incorporate sectionals; by breaking into smaller groups, conductors can deal with specific vocal or musical challenges more efficiently as they emerge, can tailor instruction to the needs of individual sections and can transform a rehearsal.

Finally, conductors acknowledged that rehearsal planning must account for the behavioural and social realities of adolescent boys. Andrew warned that rehearsals should be designed in a way that never allows the boys to sit doing nothing for more than 'half a minute'.[39] He keeps the pace of the rehearsal quick to maintain engagement. Colin always gives breaks during rehearsals, which he finds important with this age-group.[40] Fiona

[35] Appendix J, 327–328.
[36] Appendix M, 403.
[37] Appendix E, 219.
[38] Appendix H, 232–233.
[39] Appendix D, 189.
[40] Appendix F, 249.

finds that boys in particular benefit from movement and physicality in rehearsals and argues that the rehearsal structure should allow for this.[41]

Effective rehearsal planning, therefore, emerges from the interviews as a core pedagogical competency for conductors working with adolescent male singers. Planning requires a nuanced understanding of the singers' developmental, musical, physical and social needs. Conductors who consider pacing, sequencing and engagement create rehearsals that are purposeful, manageable and responsive to the boys' changing energy and vocal capacities. Flexibility again emerges as critical, highlighting the connection between preparation and real-time decision-making. In this way, rehearsal planning represents a professional competency that combines analytical thinking and adaptive pedagogy, directly supporting musical growth while fostering a secure, motivating and collaborative learning environment.

4.2.2.3 Providing differentiated and individualised teaching

Differentiated and individualised teaching emerged as a central pedagogical competency for conductors working with adolescent male singers. Participants repeatedly emphasised that the rapid, uneven and unpredictable nature of vocal change means that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is neither musically effective nor developmentally responsible. Instead, conductors must respond flexibly to each singer's capabilities, needs and vocal trajectory, adjusting expectations and instructional strategies accordingly. Insights from the interviewees align with Maria Varvarigou's writing on adopting Universal Design for Learning in the choral context, with her work highlighting that it 'facilitates the creation

[41] Appendix I, 315.

of accessible, flexible and inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment environments for all learners'.[42]

A key aspect of this competency is accurate observation of how each singer's voice is changing. Several conductors described a process of continual assessment that is far more nuanced than simple part allocation. Several spoke of listening for quality, range and ease across rehearsals, rather than relying solely on isolated and one-off tests. As Brenda says 'I listen to them and I usually ask them which part of their voice the most comfortable in? Because they will have very strong feeling'.[43] This emphasis on careful and skilful listening underpins the ability to place each singer appropriately and to make necessary changes when voices fluctuate. Differentiation often involves shifting boys between parts as their voices develop. Conductors stressed that this process must be fluid and responsive. Jenna illustrated this approach when discussing how she delays assigning parts saying that 'it's okay to jump around' different parts.[44] For her, part-testing is not a one-off event but a process that unfolds as she comes to hear and recognise where that emerging baritone can go. The ability to track this emergence requires finely tuned judgement and pedagogical patience.

Differentiated teaching also manifested in how conductors approached vocal technique. Many reported adjusting exercises to suit particular boys. Brenda noted that she would need to 'actually see what was best for that particular boy', drawing on a wide set of strategies and selecting those best suited to the boys in front of her.[45] This responsiveness

[42] Maria Varvarigou, 'Conducting Inclusion: A UDL-Inspired Approach to Choral Education', *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 47 (2025), 2.
[43] Appendix E, 223.
[44] Appendix M, 402.
[45] Appendix E, 214.

is crucial given the variability of the changing voice, which requires personalised pathways rather than uniform technical expectations.

Interview participants consistently connected differentiation with emotional and motivational considerations. Teaching adolescent boys requires sensitivity to self-consciousness, peer comparison and fluctuating confidence. Many of the conductors observed that voices may change suddenly and often something they can do one day, they cannot do it the next, noting that this instability must be managed with empathy. Differentiated instruction helps prevent boys from feeling singled out or inadequate during periods of vocal transition and several conductors noted that boys develop musically at very different rates. Fiona highlighted that placement requires considerations beyond vocal capability, with conductors needing to consider how moving to another choir or voice part might affect not only the singer moving but the ones left behind.[46] In some cases compromises have to be made. Jenna offered a way of supporting less-experienced singers by encouraging them to 'sing it once if you feel comfortable', while smaller groups of experienced mentors 'demonstrate what those parts would be'.[47] This requires a more patient, personalised approach. Differentiation in this sense is protective as it safeguards boys' willingness to participate and supports their developing identity as singers.

A recurring tension in the interviews was how to balance individual attention with the needs of the ensemble. Conductors acknowledged that rehearsal structures must remain functional even while they respond to individual variability. Some addressed this by

[46] Appendix I, 316.
[47] Appendix M, 409.

embedding differentiation into group activity rather than separating individuals out. Brenda explained that she will not 'push them into a place in the choir where they're not comfortable singing'.[48] This shows an approach where individualisation is achieved through adaptable group strategies rather than exclusively through one-to-one intervention.

Overall, the interviews portray differentiation not as an optional enhancement but as an essential pedagogical approach grounded in responsiveness, care and developmental awareness. The conductors confirm that being an effective support in this area involves listening to each singer's day-to-day vocal state and responding to the changes, making decisions about part placement, adapting technical instruction to match each boy's stage of development, maintaining group cohesion while attending to individual needs and fostering psychological safety during unpredictable vocal change. In this sense, differentiation is less a single strategy than a commitment to acknowledging each singer as an individual and to adjusting teaching in ways that allow every singer to participate fully, develop safely and sustain confidence through the complexities of adolescence.

4.2.3 Interpersonal competencies

The conductors showed great concern for the relational, social and emotional skills and knowledge that conductors use to create environments where adolescent boys feel secure, motivated and valued. They include: building positive relationships; communicating with parents and singers; and providing support and facilitating mentorship.

[48] Appendix E, 214.

4.2.3.1 Building positive relationships

Building positive relationships both between the conductor and the singers and among the singers emerged as a central interpersonal competency when working with adolescent male singers, reflecting both musical and social dimensions. Across the interviews, conductors emphasised the importance of engaging with singers on a personal level, understanding their experiences, preferences and social needs. While musical progress was undoubtedly important, it was clear that such progress could only unfold within an environment where boys felt valued, respected, understood and socially connected. The conductors' reflections underscored the idea that adolescent boys engage most deeply when the relational culture of the choir is strong and when rehearsals become not just a musical experience but a social space where they feel safe, affirmed and part of something meaningful.

A dominant theme across the interviews concerned the central importance of peer relationships**.** Andrew was explicit in framing friendship as the foundation of boys' motivation: 'the mates that they make, the friends that they make in that, and being with their mates and doing something with them, that's you know, that's fulfilling, that's positive'.[49] His comments reflect an interpersonal understanding that the social identity attached to being in the choir with friends, sharing experiences and feeling part of a group is often more influential for adolescent boys than musical outcomes alone. Fiona also located relationship-building as a core task of the conductor, stating that 'facilitating friendships within the choirs is probably the best way that I know how to get singers to

[49] Appendix D, 203.

keep coming back'.[50] Her remark situates the cultivation of friendships as an intentional interpersonal competency, rather than simply a by-product of rehearsal.

Conductors also demonstrated a keen awareness of the particular emotional and social vulnerabilities characteristic of adolescent boys. David highlighted that boys at this age are 'so self-aware and so self-conscious', a quality that can make singing in front of peers feel risky.[51] Recognising this, conductors emphasised interpersonal warmth, encouragement and non-judgmental interaction as essential for building trust. This form of relational competence involves not only supporting boys musically but also reading their emotional cues, responding to insecurities and creating a social climate in which they feel comfortable taking interpersonal and vocal risks. For several conductors, establishing a positive relational atmosphere was therefore intertwined with supporting boys' sense of identity, confidence and emotional safety.

Another relational aspect concerned the balancing of diverse personalities and motivations within the ensemble. Brenda described the interpersonal complexity that arises when 'a very ambitious singer' works within a group containing less-engaged peers.[52] Her observation illustrates the relational work required to maintain cohesion, prevent frustration and ensure all boys feel valued regardless of ability or drive. This requires diplomacy, emotional insight and an ability to mediate group dynamics so that interpersonal tensions do not erode engagement. The skill here lies in maintaining a choir culture that honours individual differences while sustaining group unity.

[50] Appendix I, 321.
[51] Appendix G, 275.
[52] Appendix E, 224.

Conductors also noted that positive relationships extend beyond the individual and the group to encompass a sense of inclusion within broader musical communities. Geraldine, for instance, discussed integrating boys' and girls' choirs for certain performances and reflected that these mixed contexts make events better and help boys feel part of a larger, shared musical culture.[53] This reflects an interpersonal strategy that broadens boys' sense of belonging and embeds them within a wider network of supportive peers and strengthens their social identity as singers.

A key interpersonal competency observed across the interviews involved relational responsiveness, wherein conductors actively check in with boys and demonstrate care for their wellbeing beyond musical tasks. Andrew illustrated this clearly when describing the importance of asking boys directly, 'are they enjoying it? Do they like the music?'[54] This simple act of relational attention signals respect for boys' experiences and acknowledges their feelings as meaningful. Similarly, Brenda's belief that rehearsals must be 'interesting always, but if you have too much on, it's a turn off' reflects an interpersonal sensitivity to boys' emotional balance and social comfort.[55] These examples show conductors attuning to boys' emotional states, adapting their interpersonal approach and maintaining a climate of mutual respect and attentiveness.

Across all interviews, relationship-building emerged as a way of engaging with adolescent boys that emphasises understanding, emotional availability and genuine connection. Conductors used humour, conversation, informal interactions and personalised encouragement to foster trust, but they also monitored social dynamics

[53] Appendix J, 341.
[54] Appendix D, 202.
[55] Appendix E, 224.

carefully, intervening when necessary to protect group harmony and individual wellbeing. The interviews make clear that adolescent boys remain in choir not merely because of musical content, but because they experience it as a relationally affirming space. Overall, building positive relationships constitutes a central interpersonal competency for conductors working with adolescent male singers. It involves intentionally cultivating friendships, supporting boys' emotional needs, navigating group social dynamics and sustaining a climate of trust and belonging. These relational practices underpin boys' engagement, confidence and long-term participation, making interpersonal competence foundational to the success and stability of adolescent male choirs.

4.2.3.2 Communicating with parents and singers

Effective communication emerged as a critical interpersonal competency for conductors working with adolescent boys. Communication with both singers and their parents shapes expectations, builds trust and fosters sustained engagement. While conductors used different strategies and worked in varied contexts, their interviews reflected a shared understanding that communication must be empathetic, transparent and grounded in respect for the developmental needs of young people.

Across the interviews, conductors described strategies for ensuring that students understand rehearsal structure, musical goals and the rationale for pedagogical decisions, which helps to reinforce clarity and trust. Fiona believes that an important task and responsibility of the conductor is 'the communication of the experience to the boys and the parents'.[56] Communication with parents also plays a role in maintaining engagement and managing expectations. Several conductors acknowledged the need to coordinate schedules and clarify commitments, particularly in contexts where school, sports and

[56] Appendix I, 315.

social life compete with choir participation. David noted that careful timetabling is essential, stating that he 'almost shape[s] my calendar around, making sure that it's open to all members'.[57] Andrew similarly noted that moderation in scheduling is critical, explaining that students enjoy 'the odd class, to miss it, but not too much', reflecting the importance of negotiating expectations through clear dialogue.[58] Transparent communication ensures that parents understand rehearsal demands and performance obligations while allowing students to balance extracurricular and academic commitments.

Communication is further linked to responsiveness within rehearsals. Conductors monitor energy levels, concentration and group dynamics, adapting tasks and instructions to meet the needs of the ensemble. Brenda stressed flexibility within planned structures, adjusting for vocal changes and emotional states.[59] Eoin described his rehearsals requiring 'adjusting to whatever the instruments are in front of you' and doing 'whatever is necessary to cultivate that sound' ensuring that conductors can assess needs in real time.[60] These responsive strategies exemplify a form of communication that is both relational and pedagogical, demonstrating attentiveness to the students' developmental stage and individual differences.

Ultimately, communicating with parents and singers in youth choirs is relational and adaptive and an important interpersonal competency for conductors. It involves articulating expectations clearly, listening actively to feedback, negotiating scheduling

[57] Appendix G, 275.
[58] Appendix D, 202.
[59] Appendix E, 212–213.
[60] Appendix H, 303.

constraints and providing consistent guidance. By maintaining open channels of communication, conductors foster trust, engagement and a shared understanding of goals. In doing so, communication becomes an interpersonal competency that supports both musical outcomes and the wellbeing of adolescent singers.

4.2.3.3 Providing support and facilitating mentorship

Providing support and facilitating mentorship emerged from the interviews as one of the richest interpersonal competencies. Conductors repeatedly emphasised the social and personal value of role models and supportive relationships that help them navigate both musical and adolescent challenges. Facilitating mentorship in this context is a deeply interpersonal competence as it builds confidence, strengthens identity and creates continuity within the ensemble.

Many conductors stressed the value of peer-to-peer mentorship. Brenda described mentorship as central to her choral practice, explaining, 'I always assign a mentor to a young boy, and they usually become very good friends', adding that 'if a mentor is good, it's invaluable. They bring the young boy on so quickly'.[61] Her comments highlight the interpersonal potency of mentorship: the younger boy receives social support, friendship and encouragement, while the older boy gains responsibility and status. This dynamic enhances the relational fabric of the choir, creating bonds across age groups. Geraldine similarly emphasised mentorship as a natural and essential part of building community. For her, 'having a few tenors there who, you know, are the strong ones' allows these older singers to 'look after everybody else in their line'.[62] Her description frames

[61] Appendix E, 226.
[62] Appendix J, 344.

mentorship not as an add-on but as a culture where older members support the younger ones through social leadership. This support helps younger boys feel like they belong, especially during the vulnerable period of early adolescence. Harry and Ian similarly described assigning older members to mentorship roles as a central part of their practice, reinforcing mentorship as a shared cultural expectation across choirs.

Fiona offered one of the most extensive discussions of mentorship, stressing its importance in incremental music education programmes. She observed that 'there's always somebody that is further along in the journey than you as a chorister', making mentorship a natural extension of the choral structure. She goes further, stating that she what she finds 'very helpful is to bring back the older singers to work as choir mentors', but emphasised that mentors 'have to be good enough to work with the young people'.[63] Her comments underscore an understanding of mentorship as relational work requiring maturity, empathy, communicative skill and musical ability. Several other conductors also spoke about the value of welcoming back former choir members to support the boys. Andrew described how he invites past members, some now professional musicians, to return: 'people who were members of the choir in the past and who are now possibly doing that on a full-time basis'.[64] This intergenerational mentorship creates a powerful interpersonal link between past and present singers, giving boys models of long-term success and reinforcing that their experiences belong to a meaningful tradition.

The importance of conductors functioning as male role models featured strongly across the interviews. Ian expressed this most explicitly: 'you can't be who you can't see'.[65] For

[63] Appendix I, 322.
[64] Appendix D, 205.
[65] Appendix L, 382.

him, having a male conductor or male leaders visible to boys helps create a sense of relatability and possibility. His belief that the 'social aspect is key' and that 'plenty of people who have changing voices in your group, are what keeps that momentum going' further emphasises the interpersonal power of peer identification.[66] Fiona echoed this sentiment, asserting that 'male conductors actually have a really important place in youth choir programmes', 'not only vocally and musically, but socially and on a human level'.[67] Her comment repositions conducting as an interpersonal profession where representation shapes boys' identity formation. Jenna contributed another layer to the interpersonal understanding of mentorship by discussing the importance of role models in shaping vocal identity: 'without a role model, there's no sense of well, actually, what is my target sound?'[68] While this comment touches on musical concepts, the interpersonal message is clear: boys draw confidence, emotional security and self-understanding from seeing older peers modelling vocal approaches in a supportive environment. Mentorship also supports boys through their social anxieties and self-esteem challenges and, as David explained, younger singers see older boys who have successfully navigated the same challenges and older singers gain empathy by supporting those following behind.[69]

Across the interviews, mentorship appeared not merely as an optional layer but as a defining interpersonal competency. It builds community, strengthens identity, supports emotional wellbeing and provides a sense of continuity. Importantly, mentorship also functions as an interpersonal retention tool. Conductors who cultivate mentorship demonstrate sophisticated interpersonal judgement: they create relational structures that

[66] Ibid., 382.
[67] Appendix I, 323.
[68] Appendix M, 40.
[69] Appendix G, 277–278.

allow boys to learn from each other, feel supported during moments of insecurity and grow socially as well as musically. This consistent emphasis across participants underscores mentorship as a vital interpersonal dimension of adolescent male choral leadership.

4.2.4 Contextual considerations

The conductors' accounts revealed that their work with adolescent male singers does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is profoundly shaped by the cultural, institutional and national contexts in which their choirs operate. These contextual considerations do not constitute competencies in themselves, but they form the conditions that make certain competencies necessary and shape the way those competencies must be enacted. Four broad contexts emerged across the interviews: school structures, cultural attitudes, parental and community engagement and national policy.

4.2.4.1 School and institutional contexts

Several conductors described a school environment in which music, and choir in particular, must continually compete for legitimacy. David emphasised the 'constant battle between music and sports', describing how boys often face pressure to prioritise athletics over musical activities.[70] This competitive environment requires conductors to be flexible in their scheduling and sensitive to boys' external commitments. His comment that he would 'shape my calendar around, making sure that it's open to all members' illustrates how institutions can shape the interpersonal and practical work of facilitating choirs for males in schools.[71]

[70] Appendix G, 275.
[71] Ibid., 275.

Other conductors identified uneven levels of music provision within schools. Brenda pointed to the decline of mandatory music training for primary teachers, noting that 'you have a lot of people who are extremely unconfident' and suggesting that boys may arrive in secondary school without early positive experiences of singing.[72] This contextual gap means conductors often inherit singers with limited musical exposure, low confidence or ambivalent feelings about singing, making relational and motivational work more complex. Jenna also highlighted structural issues in state schools, noting that 'a lot of extra-curricular in state schools is a voluntary thing', and that the expectation often falls disproportionately on music teachers.[73] Her experience underscores how limited staffing and voluntary frameworks shape the pressures placed on conductors and may influence the consistency and sustainability of boys' participation in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

4.2.4.2 Cultural and social attitudes towards boys singing

A dominant contextual theme concerned broader cultural norms surrounding masculinity and singing. Many conductors described a social environment where boys' singing is marginalised or viewed as socially precarious. Fiona argued that conductors are 'fighting some serious cultural norms', suggesting that broader social narratives inhibit boys' engagement.[74] Ian similarly described male choral singing in Ireland as 'a very niche activity', indicating that boys may struggle to see singing as a socially validated choice.[75] For Geraldine, these cultural pressures have direct consequences for individual boys: her fear is for those 'who are not strong' who might abandon singing because 'their friends maybe skit them about it'.[76] Her concern reveals how peer culture can operate as a

[72] Appendix E, 228.
[73] Appendix M, 411.
[74] Appendix I, 323.
[75] Appendix L, 383.
[76] Appendix J, 345.

barrier, making the interpersonal work of building confidence and belonging essential for recruitment and retention. Eoin further highlighted the 'obvious discrepancy' between the number of girls and boys participating in singing, reinforcing the structural imbalance that frames conductors' everyday work. These cultural factors shape conductors' interpersonal competencies by making relational safety, representation and positive identity-building essential components of effective leadership.

4.2.4.3 Parental and community engagement

Several participants described disparities in levels of parental and community support. Colin contrasted the enthusiastic turnout for sports events, noting that 'the whole town will be there', while he has experienced minimal attendance at a choir trip to Dublin, where only four parents attended.[77] His account illustrates a wider cultural undervaluing of boys' singing and highlights a contextual challenge conductors must navigate: supporting boys when the surrounding adult community may not affirm their participation. Andrew noted that boys themselves often do not want to miss school too frequently for choir, suggesting that conductors must balance performance opportunities with sensitivity to boys' academic and familial responsibilities.[78] This again requires interpersonal finesse, shaped by contextual expectations of schooling and community priorities. Geraldine's practice of integrating choirs for performances and participating in informal community events also reflects a strategy for countering contextual limitations by increasing visibility and building community support around the boys' work.[79]

4.2.4.4 National policy and conditions

[77] Appendix F, 251.
[78] Appendix D, 202.
[79] Appendix J, 342.

The conductors also pointed to broader structural and policy-level challenges that affect boys' singing in Ireland. Fiona was particularly explicit, describing 'dwindling in numbers at every level' and criticising the absence of 'national commitment to regenerating a community or a society of boys who sing'.[80] She warned that Ireland possesses 'incredibly trained, skilled, educated people' whose expertise is 'an underutilised resource', framing the issue not as a lack of capacity but a lack of structural support. Harry similarly argued that Irish boys' singing 'needs an awareness campaign or some sort of intervention that is backed with some serious resources', pointing to systemic underinvestment.[81] Ian and Jenna identified geographical disparities, noting that 'pockets of absolute excellence' exist alongside areas with limited opportunity, often tied to long-standing school traditions, but that the provision is not uniform across the island.[82] [83]These policy-level considerations shape the context in which all interpersonal and organisational competencies must operate. Conductors are often required to advocate, lobby for support and build programmes in environments where institutional backing is limited or inconsistent.

4.2.5 The training and preparation of conductors

A striking level of consensus emerged regarding the lack of formal training available to conductors working with adolescent males. Those who completed undergraduate conducting or music education degrees reported no dedicated instruction on changing voices, adolescent vocal development or pedagogical strategies tailored to boys undergoing voice change. They did not appear overly familiar with the literature on

[80] Appendix I, 323.
[81] Appendix K, 369.
[82] Appendix L, 383.
[83] Appendix M, 410.

conducting adolescent changing voices and none cited any specific research. Only one participant, Ian, encountered any material on this topic during postgraduate study and, even then, the exposure was limited and largely self-driven.[84] This reflects a broader pattern in which training for this context is informal, incidental or entirely self-created rather than research-informed and embedded within structured curricula.

To compensate, several conductors sought knowledge through short courses or independent study. Jenna and Ian had completed an online course with Jenevora Williams, which they found helpful but not comprehensive. Ian also noted that aspects of Estill training 'speak a little bit to the changing voice', though this was peripheral rather than central. Others relied on occasional workshops, conferences or selective reading.[85] While many participants engaged in substantial continuing professional development, none identified any course as offering thorough preparation. Some were explicit about the absence of relevant training: David described relying primarily on practical experience, while Harry spoke of gradually assembling 'nuggets of information' over time.[86]

The result was that nearly all conductors felt unprepared when they first began working with boys experiencing voice change. Brenda described the 'hardest part' as managing newly changed voices and noted that written guidance was often inconsistent or unhelpful.[87] Eoin similarly reported frequent gaps in knowledge and rarely feeling fully equipped to address the challenges he faced.[88] Fiona stated that she 'knew nothing going

[84] Appendix L, 372.
[85] Estill Voice Training is a programme for developing vocal skills based on analysing the process of vocal production in order to control specific structures within the vocal mechanism. More information is available at https://estillvoice.com/about/ [accessed 27 December 2025].
[86] Appendix G, 258; Appendix K,350.
[87] Appendix E, 215.
[88] Appendix H, 296–297.

in' and learned entirely on the job, particularly in balancing vocal needs with the social and emotional implications of voice-part placement.[89] Several participants also highlighted a lack of prior exposure. Jenna, having attended an all-girls school, had never encountered adolescent male voices before entering the profession.[90] Harry recalled having 'no kind of clear idea for how I could deal with those changing voices' when deciding whether a boy should sing alto, tenor or baritone.[91] Geraldine undertook extensive self-directed professional development but still felt compelled to conduct her own research to support boys effectively.[92]

Few had opportunities to reflect on their own approach or the characteristics they wished to embody when working with boys and many commented on how much they appreciated this opportunity as part of this research project. Across interviews, participants described not only gaps in musical and technical knowledge about voice change, but also a broader absence of support across the three competency domains identified in the coding system. Pedagogical preparation was similarly insufficient as conductors relied on self-study or experiential learning to select repertoire, design rehearsals and assign voice parts. Interpersonal competencies were likewise underdeveloped in available training, despite conductors repeatedly emphasising the need for guidance in motivating, reassuring and communicating with boys during a sensitive developmental period. Finally, participants noted that the highly specific contextual realities of this work, including fluctuating vocal abilities, complex social dynamics, the emotional turbulence of puberty and cultural

[89] Appendix I, 316.
[90] Appendix M, 397.
[91] Appendix K, 355.
[92] Appendix J, 328.

attitudes towards boys singing in Ireland were never addressed in their training, leaving conductors to navigate these challenges independently.

Mentorship featured regularly in the interviews. In addition to the conductors considering themselves as mentors for the young boys they work with and creating opportunities for older singers to mentor the younger ones, several referred to the importance of getting advice from others working in the field, particularly in light of the paucity of training opportunities. Ian spoke about his approach, which involves both speaking directly to colleagues and reaching out to them on social media. Given that so many spoke of the importance of mentorship within their choral settings, it is interesting to note that they themselves rarely engage in formal mentorship opportunities.

Chapter Five

A Framework of Conductor Competencies for Supporting Adolescent Male Choral Singers

5.1 The framework

An analysis of the literature on general conducting competencies emerged under three broad competency areas: musical and technical competencies; pedagogical competencies; and interpersonal competencies. The literature on conducting adolescent changing voices was organised around three themes: the voice, i.e., the technical elements of singing during vocal change; the music, i.e., the repertoire and rehearsal strategies; and the people, i.e., the ways in which conductors relate to the singers. The competencies emerging from these themes could be mapped onto the same three competency areas as emerged in the general literature. This alignment provided a coherent conceptual structure for analysing the interview data. Accordingly, the interviews were coded using these three competency areas as high-level domains. Within each domain, a wide range of skills, knowledge and behaviours emerged, reflecting what expert practitioners considered essential when working with adolescent male singers.

The resulting framework integrates the general conducting competencies established in existing models and frameworks[1] with context-specific competencies identified in the literature on adolescent male voices[2] and the practice-grounded competencies that emerged from the interviews.[3] While the survey of the training landscape did not produce

[1] See Chapter 3.1, 58.
[2] See Chapter 3.2, 72.
[3] See Chapter 4.2, 114.

substantial new information,[4] it provided a means of triangulating the findings. In some cases, competencies drawn from general conducting literature remained applicable exactly as they appeared, demonstrating their relevance across all choral contexts. In other cases, competencies took on new meaning when situated within the highly specific context of adolescent male singers and the literature and practitioner insights provided necessary refinements or entirely new components. The final framework therefore represents a synthesis of general conducting competencies and those uniquely shaped by the developmental, musical and social characteristics of adolescent boys. The manifestation of the competencies outlined must always respond to the considerations of the cultural and social contexts in which the framework is employed.

What follows is an overview of the framework, illustrating its three domains and their associated subdomains. Each competency area is then explored in detail, outlining both the general competencies and the context-specific competencies within each subdomain. In-text citations document the sources from which each competency was derived, with context-specific competencies emerging from the integration of the literature and interview data.

[4] See Chapter 3.3, 105.

5.1.1 An overview

Table 5.1 An overview of the framework

Domain	Subdomains
Musical and technical	Aural skills Conducting technique and physical communication Knowledge of the vocal mechanism Voice placement and classification Repertoire selection, adaptation and score preparation
Pedagogical	Pedagogical adaptability and responsive teaching Teaching vocal technique and supporting the developing voice Planning and delivering developmentally appropriate warm-ups Planning, structuring and pacing rehearsals Providing differentiated and individualised teaching Facilitating singer autonomy and agency
Interpersonal	Creating a positive and safe choral environment Building positive relationships Role modelling Fostering belonging and social cohesion Communicating with singers and parents Motivating and engaging Facilitating mentorship

5.1.2 Musical and technical competencies

Table 5.2 A detailed description of the musical and technical competencies

Subdomain	General competencies	Context-specific competencies
Aural skills	• Demonstrates a high level of aural skills, including error detection (Durrant, 1996; Apfelstadt, 1997; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Exhibits aural awareness of expressive nuance and ensemble (Gumm, 2012; Apfelstadt, 1997; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021)	• Recognises vocal changes in speaking, such as timbral change or increased breathiness or in singing, such as the loss of head voice or the emergence of falsetto (Dilworth, 2012; Freer, 2022; Ashley, 2014; Willis and Kenny, 2008; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E)

		• Detects when technical or physical demands exceed healthy limits for a changing voice (Leck, 2009; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H; Interview with Colin, Appendix F) • Identifies signs of vocal strain, inappropriate range or tessitura and fatigue associated with voice change (Dilworth, 2012; Roe, 1994; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Ian, Appendix L)
Conducting technique and physical communication	• Uses a clear gestural vocabulary that communicates tempo, meter, phrasing, articulation, dynamics and musical character or mood (Durrant, 1996; Gumm, 2012; Apfelstadt, 1997; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Employs a communicative and expressive technique grounded in artistry and musicality (Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Gumm, 2012)	• Shapes gesture to support vocal ease in inexperienced or developing voices (Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Integrates gesture and physical modelling when teaching repertoire to encourage movement and embodied musicality, reflecting adolescent learners' engagement with physicality (Freer, 2012; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E)
Knowledge of the vocal mechanism	• Understands the foundational principles of health vocal technique in choral settings (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Roe, 1994) • Understands how warm-ups can prepare voices for technical and musical demands (Durrant, 1996; Williams, 2019)	• Possesses deep knowledge of the vocal mechanism and physiological processes of male vocal change (Sweet, 2020; Roe, 1994; Killian and Wayman, 2010; Interview with Ian, Appendix L) • Understands range, tessitura and each stage of voice change (Cooksey, 2000; Dilworth, 2012; Thurman, 2012; Interview with Harry, Appendix K)

		• Uses current evidence-based research on adolescent male vocal development to inform instruction (Thurman, 2012; Sweet, 2020; Roe, 1994; Ashley, 2014; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Harry, Appendix K) • Recognises when challenges require referral to a vocal specialist and understands the boundaries of their own expertise. (Freer, 2022; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I)
Voice placement and classification	• Demonstrates skill in assessing vocal qualities and understanding the importance of correct vocal classification (Roe, 1994, Durrant, 2003)	• Assigns singers to appropriate parts in recognition of voice change (Cooksey, 2000; Friddle, 2005; Gend, Allen and Scott, 2017; Ashley, 2014; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Colin, Appendix F; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J) • Uses contemporary systems for classifying changing voices (Cooksey, 2000; Cooper, 1965; Swanson, 1973; Interview with Harry, Appendix K) • Tracks boys' vocal changes systematically (Cooksey, 2000; Interview with Harry, Appendix K; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Identifies when vocal demands exceed boys' current capabilities and adjusts accordingly (Sweet, 2020; Cooksey, 2000; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with David,

		Appendix G; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Engages adolescents in the placement process**,** supporting their agency, understanding and self-awareness while maintaining professional oversight (Freer, 2006; Bell, 2001; Garrett, 2014; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M)
Repertoire selection, adaptation and score preparation	• Prepares scores thoroughly, in relation to the text, harmony, structure, technical demands and stylistic requirements (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Demonstrates language skills relevant to the choral repertoire. (Durrant, 1996; Apfelstadt, 1997; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Understands the expressive potential of repertoire (Durrant, 1996; Gumm, 2012; Apfelstadt, 1997)	• Approaches repertoire selection as a technical, developmental and artistic decision (Collins, 2012; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Selects repertoire that aligns with range and tessitura appropriate for boys at different stages, supports healthy technique and vocal development, is flexible to accommodate the changing voices and offers a wide range of musical styles to the young singers (Beery, 2020; Crawford, 2017; Ashley, 2014; Collins, 2012; Cooksey, 2000; Interview with Harry, Appendix K; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Colin, Appendix F) • Anticipates how the demands of the score interact with the physiology of the changing voice (Freer, 2006; Cooksey, 2000; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Colin,

		Appendix F; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Identifies sections of the score that may require adaptation, simplification or rewriting (Hower, 2006; Cooper, 1965; Interview with Ian, Appendix L)

5.1.3 Pedagogical competencies

Table 5.3 A detailed description of the pedagogical competencies

Subdomain	**General competencies**	**Context-specific competencies**
Pedagogical adaptability and responsive teaching	• Adapts teaching strategies to the needs of the ensemble (Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Apfelstadt, 1997; Varvarigou, 2009) • Integrates technical instruction with interpersonal awareness and situational responsiveness (Apfelstadt, 1997; Varvarigou, 2009) • Reflects critically on practice, evaluating and changing as needed (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Garnett, 2009)	• Tailors teaching to the unpredictable developmental changes of adolescent boys (Freer, 2006; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Reads boys' vocal, emotional and behavioural states in real time, adjusting tasks accordingly (Collins, 2012; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Identifies signs of fatigue or discomfort and adapts instruction immediately (Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Maintains the ability to pivot effectively when voice changes, energy levels or group dynamics shift (Dillworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Recognises when a singer's needs require individual attention, peer support or modified expectations (Dilworth, 2012; Interview

		with Eoin, Appendix H; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I)
Teaching vocal technique and supporting the developing voice	• Teaches foundational vocal technique through clear and sequenced instruction (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Uses modelling, guided practice and accessible language to introduce technique (Gumm, 2012; Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021)	• Communicates technical ideas in age-appropriate, confidence-building ways, avoiding overload of terminology (Killian, 1997; White and White, 2001; Interview with Ian, Appendix L; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Teaches technique through embodied and experiential approaches (Williams, 2019; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Helps boys develop healthy vocal habits (poise, breathing, ease of phonation) while acknowledging the physical changes (Sweet, 2020; Cooksey, 2000; Williams, 2019; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J) • Encourages the safe exploration of range, falsetto, register transitions and new vocal capabilities (Cooksey, 2000; Swanson, 1973; Mckenzie, 1956; Leck, 2009; Williams, 2019; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Provides clear information about what voice change is, demystifying the experience and reducing anxiety (Bell, 2001; Denison and Denison, 2019; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M;

		Interview with Colin, Appendix F) • Aligns vocal tasks with each singer's current developmental stage, not their age or expected trajectory (Cooksey, 2020; Roe, 1994; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J)
Planning and delivering developmentally appropriate warm-ups	• Designs warm-ups that build stamina, flexibility and confidence (Brunner, 1996; Varvarigou, 2009) • Connects warm-ups to repertoire (Varvarigou, 2009)	• Selects vocal exercises appropriate to changing voices (Dilworth, 2012; McKenzie, 1956; Freer, 2009; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Adapts vocal exercises to best develop the voices (Fisher, 2019; McKenzie, 1956; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Demonstrates an ability to develop the changing voice through vocal exercises (Fisher, 2019; White and White, 2001; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M) • Monitors fatigue and adjusts the warm-ups accordingly (Freer, 2009; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M)
Planning, structuring and pacing rehearsals	• Designs rehearsals with clear sequencing, pacing and learning goals (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Structures learning in ways that build skills progressively and efficiently (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Creates an environment conducive to focus,	• Plans rehearsals that maintain predictability, clarity and purpose, which support adolescent focus and balance artistic goals with developmental responsibility (Garrett, 2014; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I)

	engagement and musical development (Durrant, 1996; Varvarigou, 2009)	• Devises fast-paced, purposefully paced rehearsals to reduce behavioural issues (Cooper, 1965; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Colin, Appendix F) • Builds physicality and kinaesthetic learning into rehearsals (Freer, 2006; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Incorporates sectionals, group activities and varied tasks to maintain engagement and address specific challenges (Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Plans rehearsals that account for vocal fatigue and fluctuating vocal capacity (Interview with Ian, Appendix L; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M)
Providing differentiated and individualised teaching	• Uses differentiated instruction to support varying levels of experience, skill and learning pace (Varvarigou, 2009; Wis, 2007) • Teaches in ways that address individual strengths and areas for development (Varvarigou, 2009; Apfelstadt, 1997)	• Conducts ongoing, nuanced assessment of boys' voices (quality, range, ease, fatigue) across rehearsals) (Cooksey, 2000; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Harry; Appendix K; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Adapts singing tasks, technical expectations and part assignments fluidly as voices shift (Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Ian, Appendix L; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Provides individualised technical guidance appropriate to each boy's

		developmental stage (Stamer,1999; Kennedy, 2004; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Colin, Appendix F) • Balances individualised instruction with ensemble needs, embedding differentiation into group activities (Leck, 2009, Freer, 2006; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I)
Facilitating singer autonomy and agency	• Engages learners actively in their own learning process (Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990; Varvarigou, 2009) • Encourages reflection, autonomy and shared ownership of the musical experience (Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990) • Incorporates dialogue, shared problem-solving and collaborative learning strategies (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990; Varvarigou, 2009) • Encourages pluralistic participation to foster shared responsibility between conductor and singers (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Varvarigou, 2009)	• Enables boys to reflect on their singing, analyse their own performances and articulate musical ideas (Garrett, 2014; Ashley and Nichols, 2021; Interview with David, Appendix G) • Encourages peer learning, mentoring and role modelling within the ensemble (White and White, 2001; Cooksey, 2000; Graffius, 2025) • Involves boys appropriately in decisions about repertoire, voice placement and rehearsal processes where developmentally suitable (Wong et all, 2010; Abrahams, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D)

5.1.4 Interpersonal competencies

Table 5.4 A detailed description of the interpersonal competencies

Subdomain	**General competencies**	**Context-specific competencies**
Creating a positive and safe choral environment	• Establishing a positive, non-threatening rehearsal atmosphere (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Communicating with warmth, clarity and encouragement (Gumm, 2012; Varvarigou, 2009; Durrant, 1996; • Maintaining predictable routines that promote security (Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990)	• Creating an environment where adolescent boys feel safe taking vocal risks (Sweet; 2020; Dilworth, 2012; Young, 2012; Stamer,1999; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Reducing embarrassment and normalise voice cracks and unpredictability (Sweet, 2020; Ashley, 2014; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with David, Appendix G) • Providing a sense of stability during a period of social and emotional upheaval (Collins, 2012; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E) • Reinforcing social safety through non-judgmental responses (Leck, 2009; Interview with David, Appendix G) • Actively attending to boys' emotional states and adjust rehearsal tone accordingly (Collins, 2012; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Using humour, friendliness and informal interactions to build ease **(**Freer, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D)

Building positive relationships	• Demonstrating empathy, patience and relational sensitivity (Durrant, 1996; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Varvarigou, 2011) • Building rapport and connection with individuals and the group (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990) • Communicating respect and fairness consistently (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Durrant, 1996)	• Understanding boys' heightened self-consciousness during adolescence (Dilworth, 2012; Sweet, 2020; Interview with David, Appendix G) • Recognising the importance of relational safety for sustained participation (Surti, 2008; Collins, 2012; Cooper, 1965; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J) • Communicating about enjoyment, confidence and comfort with repertoire (Stamer, 1999; Swanson, 1973; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I) • Balancing diverse personalities and particularly supporting quieter or anxious singers (Cooper, 1965; Sweet, 2020; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E)
Role modelling	• Modelling confidence, positivity, professionalism and enthusiasm (Apfelstadt, 1997; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Demonstrating emotional regulation and composure • Leading with integrity and consistency (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990)	• Modelling healthy attitudes to voice change, singing and masculinity (Abrahams, 2012; White and White, 2001; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Harry, Appendix K) • Counteracting stereotypes that 'singing is not for boys' (Sweet, 2020; Collins, 2012; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Colin, Appendix F; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Using role modelling to support identity formation (Collins, 2012; White and

		White, 2001; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J) • Providing a steady, reliable anchor during moments of insecurity (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2001; Collins, 2012; Interview with David, Appendix G; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I) • Demonstrating positive musical, social and emotional behaviours that the boys can imitate (Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M)
Fostering belonging and social cohesion	• Cultivating group cohesion and team spirit (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996) • Facilitating positive peer interactions (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996) • Managing group dynamics effectively (Durrant, 1996, Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021)	• Supporting friendship formation as a driver of retention (Collins, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Intentionally creating opportunities for boys to socialise and bond Managing tensions between highly ambitious and less confident singers (Leck, 2009; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Recognising that peer relationships strongly influence boys' motivation (Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J)
Communicating with singers and parents	• Communicating clearly, transparently and age-appropriately (Durrant,	• Explaining voice change in supportive, demystifying ways (Cooksey, 2000; Leck, 2009; Interview with

	1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Providing constructive feedback and positive reinforcement (Durrant, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021) • Adapting instructional communication in real time (Apfelstadt, 1997)	Harry, Appendix K; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H) • Communicating sensitively about repertoire, part placement and vocal changes (Collins, 2012; Leck, 2009; Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Negotiating demanding schedules with families (sports, school, choir) (Freer, 2012; Cooper, 1965; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with David, Appendix G) • Maintaining open dialogues with boys about comfort, challenge and enjoyment (Stupple, 2007; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Coordinating expectations with parents to support ongoing participation (Collins, 2012; Interview with Fiona, Appendix I) • Using communication to shape focus, behaviour and emotional readiness (Collins, 2012, Interview with Jenna, Appendix M)
Motivating and engaging	• Inspiring commitment and enthusiasm (Gumm, 2012; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Durrant, 1996) • Providing encouragement that supports confidence and risk-taking (Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021; Durrant, 1996) • Setting achievable goals matched to developmental stages (Durrant, 1996;	• Keeping rehearsals varied, fast-paced and socially engaging (Dilworth, 2012; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Using students' interests and preferences to enhance motivation (Denison and Denison, 2019; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Motivating boys by integrating social belonging with musical

	Apfelstadt and Allen, 1990)	challenge (Collins, 2012; Interview with Eoin, Appendix H; Interview with Ian, Appendix L) • Selecting repertoire that builds confidence and meets developmental needs while being enjoyable (Collins, 2012; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J) • Balancing high artistic standards with the realities of changing voices (Wis, 2007; Collins, 2012; Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J)
Facilitating mentorship	• Providing guidance, mentoring and emotional support (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Varvarigou, 2011) • Facilitating supportive learning communities among singers (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1996; Jansson, Døving and Elstad, 2021)	• Offering reassurance during difficult phases of voice change (Collins, 2012; Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Ian, Appendix L) • Building structures where older boys support younger singers (Cooksey, 2000, Interview with Brenda, Appendix E; Interview with Harry, Appendix K) • Assigning peer mentors intentionally to build confidence and belonging (Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J; Interview with Harry, Appendix K; Interview with Ian, Appendix L) • Involving alumni or older students as role models (Interview with Fiona, Appendix I; Interview with Andrew, Appendix D) • Fostering a culture where boys support one another emotionally and socially (Collins, 2012; Interview with Jenna, Appendix M;

		Interview with Geraldine, Appendix J)

Conclusion

Supporting adolescent males effectively during voice change requires a level of conductor expertise that extends beyond general choral training. The ability to respond appropriately during this period of change is not separate to choral success and to the continued participation of boys in choirs; it is central to sustaining boys' engagement, protecting vocal health and fostering positive musical identities. This study demonstrates that such expertise is rarely developed through systematic preparation; evidence from both the survey of the training landscape and the interviews with practitioners indicates that conductors typically develop the skills required to support adolescent males through fragmented, informal and often reactive learning, usually once they are already working in the context. Existing conducting education and professional development pathways tend to prioritise generic musicianship and ensemble leadership and do not sufficiently prepare conductors for the unique demands of the cambiata context. This absence of structured preparation affirms the need for clearer articulation of the competencies required to work effectively with adolescent male singers.

In response, this research develops the first comprehensive, research- and practice-informed framework that explicitly defines the competencies that conductors need to support adolescent males during voice change. By synthesising literature on adolescent vocal development, choral pedagogy and psychosocial factors with the lived experiences of conductors working in Ireland and Northern Ireland, the framework provides a coherent account of the musical, pedagogical, interpersonal and contextual capabilities required in this specialised setting. In doing so, it bridges a longstanding gap between

theory and practice in youth choral education and offers a concrete resource that can inform conductor education, professional learning and reflective practice.

The findings also highlight mentorship as a critical, yet under-utilised, approach for developing conductor capability in this area. While mentorship is commonly embedded within choral programmes for young singers, opportunities for conductors to engage in sustained, specialist mentorship are limited. Given the scarcity of formal training opportunities, mentorship emerges as an important way of sharing best practices among practitioners and developing the competencies of those who aspire to best support their male adolescent singers. Moreover, because mentorship is a crucial interpersonal competency for conductors, as attested to both in the literature and in the interviews and included in the framework, training opportunities that are delivered through mentorship could have the dual purpose of upskilling conductors to develop important competencies in the highly specific context while also providing a model of effective mentoring that they can draw on in their own choirs.

The study further emphasises the need for stronger connections between research and professional practice. In the absence of accessible, comprehensive, context-specific guidance, conductors often rely on trial-and-error learning or self-directed reading, which can perpetuate gaps in knowledge or ineffective strategies. The framework developed here provides research-informed guidance that can help conductors move beyond this experimental approach and act with informed intentionality. At the same time, the study affirms the value of practitioner knowledge, demonstrating that conductors working with adolescent males possess insights that are highly relevant yet underrepresented in the literature. Creating more structured avenues for practitioners to contribute to research

would strengthen the evidence base and support the ongoing development of the field. Emerging from the interviews is an overwhelming belief among practitioners that many boys suffer from a lack of high-quality singing experiences in Ireland, with many citing the primary school as a context which fails to support boys adequately. There is a unique opportunity at this moment, with the forthcoming publication of the new primary school curriculum toolkits,[5] to support teachers in offering practical help and advice in this area. However, this research has highlighted the highly specialised nature of the work, affirming that any meaningful development in approaches to boys' singing in the Irish primary school needs ongoing support from practitioners with the competencies listed in the framework.

The framework presented in this dissertation represents an initial step in addressing these challenges. Future research should test and refine the framework through evaluating it in diverse choral and educational contexts and through the inclusion of adolescent male singers' perspectives. Involving young singers directly would ensure that conductor competencies remain responsive to their experiences, needs and motivations. Through diverse practitioner engagement, international evaluation and continual refinement, the framework can evolve into a dynamic, evidence-informed tool that enhances conductor preparation and supports more effective, sustainable choral practice for adolescent male singers internationally.

This study makes an original contribution to knowledge by integrating conductor competency frameworks and models with scholarship on adolescent male voice change,

[55] According to the 'Curriculum Online' website, the Arts Education Toolkit is expected in September 2026 <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/primary/curriculum-area-toolkits/arts-education-toolkit/> [accessed 4 May 2026].

aiming to alleviate a long-standing pedagogical challenge through enhanced conductor capability within a specialised choral context. By incorporating practitioner perspectives from Ireland and Northern Ireland, it addresses a notable gap in the literature and demonstrates the value of practice-based knowledge in shaping effective pedagogical frameworks. The framework developed here offers a structured articulation of competencies that can inform conductor education and professional development. Its significance lies in establishing a foundation for future research, curriculum development and mentorship-based training and positioning conductor preparation as a key factor in sustaining boys' long-term engagement in choral singing and in supporting choral music to thrive.

Bibliography

Abrahams, Frank, 'Changing Voices – Voices of Change: Young Men in Middle School Choirs', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 79–92

Allen, S. Gail and Apfelstadt, Hilary, 'Leadership Styles and the Choral Conductor', *Choral Journal*, 30 (1990), 25–27, 30–31

An Roinn Oideachais/ Department of Education, *Leaving Certificate Music Syllabus: Higher and Ordinary Level Courses* (Dublin: Stationery Office, Department of Education, 1996)

Anderson, Terry and Shattuck, Julie, 'Design-Based Research: A Decade of Progress in Education Research?', *Educational Researcher*, 41 (2022), 16–25

Anderson, Thea, Valiauga, Rasa, Tallo, Christian, Hong, Catriona Blythe, Manoranjithan, Shaminy, Domingo, Catherine, Paudel, Manasvi, Untaroiu, Ana, Barr, Samantha and Goldhaber, Kate, 'Contributing Factors to the Rise in Adolescent Anxiety and Associated Mental Health Disorders: A Narrative Review of Current Literature', *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 38 (2025), 1–10

Anon, 'Obituary Notice: Lennox Browne, F.R.C.S.E.', *The Journal of Laryngology, Rhinology and Otology*, 17 (1902), 629–631

Anthony, J. Pierce, 'Choirs and Choir Schools in the History of Church Music' (MA dissertation, Boston University, 1956)

Apfelstadt, Hilary, 'Applying Leadership Models in Teaching Choral Conductors', *Choral Journal*, 37 (1997), 23–30

———, 'Keys to Successful Teacher Education', *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 5 (1996), 4–5

Armstrong, Susan and Armstrong, Scott, 'The Conductor as Transformational Leader', *Music Educators Journal*, 82 (1996), 22–25

Ashley, Martin, 'Broken Voices or a Broken Curriculum? The Impact of Research on UK School Choral Practice with Boys', *British Journal of Music Education*, 30 (2013), 311–327

———, *Contemporary Choral Work with Boys* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2014)

———, *How High Should Boys Sing?: Gender, Authenticity and Credibility in the Young Male Voice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009)

———, *Singing in the Lower Secondary School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015)

———, ‘The Angel Enigma: Experienced Boy Singers’ Perceptual Judgements of Changing Voices’, *Music Education Research*, 13 (2011), 343–354

———, ‘The English Choral Tradition and the Secular Trend in Boys’ Pubertal Timing’, *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 4 (2013), 4–27

———, ‘Trends in Young Male Puberty and the Changing Voice: New Dilemmas for Choir Directors’, *Choral Journal*, 62 (2021), 61– 64

———, ‘What Voices have Emerged? Lessons on Boys’ Vocal Dispositions and Choral Tone from a New Choral Leaflet Series’, *Music Education Research*, 21 (2019), 135–149

Ayres, Braeden T., ‘Pedagogical Choral Repertoire for Early Adolescent Males in the United States: A Descriptive Study’ (PhD dissertation, Florida State University College of Music, 2020)

Barbier, Patrick, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon* (London: Souvenir Press, 1998)

Barrett, Howard, ‘Choral Training in the Junior High School with Reference to the Changing Voice’ (MA dissertation, University of Arizona, 1935)

Beery, Lon, *The Cambiata Collection: Range-ready Repertoire for Developing TTB Choirs* (Van Nuys, California: Alfred, 2020)

Behnke, Emil and Browne, Lennox, *The Child’s Voice: Its Treatment with Regard to After-Development* (New York: Oliver Ditson Company, 1885)

Bell, Christopher, *My Voice is Changing!: Useful Information for Boys, Choir Directors, and Parents Before and During Voice Changes* (Glasgow: National Youth Choir of Scotland, 2001)

Best, Olivia and Ban, Sasha, ‘Adolescence: Physical Changes and Neurological Development’, *British Journal of Nursing*, 30 (2021), 272–275

Blakemore, Sarah-Jayne, ‘Adolescence and Mental Health’, *Lancet*, 393 (2019), 2030–2031

Bowers, Judy, ‘Structuring Successes in Beginning Middle School Choral Ensembles’, in Frank Abrahms (ed.), *Teaching Music through Performance in Middle School Choir* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2011), 57–73

Boynton, Susan and Rice, Eric, *Young Choristers, 650-1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2008)

Braun, Virginia and Clarke, Victoria, ‘Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology’, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2006), 77–101

Brunner, David L., ‘Carefully Crafting the Choral Rehearsal’, *Music Educators Journal*, 83 (1996), 37-39

Burn-Murdoch, John, 'A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging', *Financial Times*, 26 January 2024 < https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998> [accessed 10 November 2025]

Centre for Social Justice, *Lost Boys: State of the Nation* (London: Centre for Social Justice, 2025)

Child, Simon F. J. and Shaw, Stuart D., 'A Purpose-led Approach Towards the Development of Competency Frameworks', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44 (2020), 1143– 1156

Cohen, Louis, Manion, Lawrence and Morrison, Keith, *Research Methods in Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 8th edn, 2017)

Collins, Anita, 'A Boy's Music Ecosystem', in Scott Harrison (ed.), *Male Voices: Stories of Boys Learning through Making Music* (Camberwell: ACER Press, 2009), 33–46

———, 'Creating a Culture for Teenagers to Sing in High School', in Scott Harrison, Graham Welch and Adam Adler (eds), *Perspectives on Males and Singing* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 95–107

Collins, Don L., 'Preferred Practices in Teaching Boys Whose Voices are Changing', *American Choral Directors Association*, 47 (2006), 119–121

———, *Teaching Choral Music* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2nd edn, 1999)

———, 'The Cambiata Concept: More than Just about Changing Voices', *Choral Journal*, 23 (1982), 5–9

Collins, Drew, 'Using Repertoire to Teach Vocal Pedagogy in All-Male Changing Voice Choirs', *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 35–41

Cooksey, John M., 'The Development of a Contemporary, Eclectic Theory for the Training and Cultivation of the Junior High School Male Changing Voice: Part II: Scientific and Empirical Findings; Some Tentative Solutions', *Choral Journal*, 18 (1977), 5–16

———, 'Voice Transformation in Male Adolescents', in Leon Thurman and Graham Welch (eds), *Bodymind and Voice: Foundations of Voice Education* (Collegeville, Minneapolis: The VoiceCare Network, 2000), 718–738

———, *Working with Adolescent Voices* (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2nd edn, 1999)

Cooper, Irvin, 'The Junior High School Choral Problem', *Music Educators Journal*, 37 (1950), 20–21

——— and Kuersteiner, Karl O., *Teaching Junior High School Music* (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1956)

Cooper, Naomi, ‘Design-Based Research as an Informal Learning Model for Choral Conductors’, *London Review of Education*, 15 (2017), 358–370

Copland Kennedy, Mary, ‘“It’s a Metamorphosis”: Guiding the Voice Change at the American Boychoir School’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 54 (2004), 264–280

Covey, Stephen R., *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (London: Simon and Schuster, 3rd edn, 2020)

Crawford, Ian, *Changing Voices: Songs for Boys* (London: Novello, 2017)

Crocker, Emily, ‘Choosing Music for Middle School Choirs’, *Music Educators Journal*, 86 (2000), 33–37

Curriculum Online, *Arts Education Toolkit* <https://www.curriculumonline.ie/primary/curriculum-area-toolkits/arts-education-toolkit/> [accessed 4 May 2026]

Curwen, John Spencer, ‘Emil Behnke’, *The Musical Herald*, 1 October 1892, 291–294

Denison, Craig and Denison, Maria, ‘Uncovering Meaning and Identity through Voice Change’, *Choral Journal*, 59 (2019), 28–37

Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum: Music* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999)

Dilworth, Rollo, ‘Working with Male Adolescent Voices in the Choral Rehearsal: A Survey of Research-Based Strategies’, *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 22–33

Dolan, Nicholas A., ‘The Life and Legacy of Duncan McKenzie (1885–1961): A Champion of Twentieth-Century Music Pedagogy’, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* (2025), 1–22

Dumont, Sandrine, ‘Choirboys and Vicaires at the Maîtrise of Cambrai: A Socio-anthropological Study (1500-1670)’, in Susan Boynton and Eric Rice (eds), *Young Choristers, 650-1700* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), 146–162

Durrant, Colin, *Choral Conducting: Philosophy and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003)

———, ‘Towards a Model of Effective Choral Conducting: Implications for Music Education, Musical Communication and Curriculum Development’ (PhD dissertation, Roehampton Institute London, 1996)

Faverio, Michelle, Anderson, Monica and Park, Eugenie, *Teens and Social Media Mental Health* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Centre, 2005)

Fisher, Ryan A., ‘British and American Theories of the Changing Male Voice: An Historical Overview’, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 31 (2009), 37–47

———, ‘Research-to-Resource: A Choral Director’s Abridged Guide to the Male Voice Change’, *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 38 (2019), 5–9
———, ‘The Impacts of the Voice Change, Grade Level, and Experience on the Singing Self Efficacy of Emerging Adolescent Males’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 62 (2014), 277–290

Floriani, Rosalia, Mantara Anggawirya, Arin, Sijabat, Survey, Istiqomah, Nurul and Giovani, Evelin, ‘An Exploration of Adolescent Psychological Issues in the Netflix Series Adolescence (2025)’, *Lingua Franca*, 4 (2025), 67–80

Freer, Patrick, ‘Adapt, Build, and Challenge: Three Keys to Effective Choral Rehearsals for Young Adolescents’, *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 48–55

———, ‘Between Research and Practice: How Choral Music Loses Boys in the “Middle School”‘, *Music Educators Journal*, 94 (2007), 28–34

———, ‘Choral Warm-Ups for Changing Adolescent Voices’, *Music Educators Journal*, 95 (2009), 57–62

———, ‘Educational Research: Practical Implications for the Rehearsal’, *Choral Journal*, 33 (1992), 29–34

———, ‘Foundation of the Boy’s Expanding Voice: A Response to Henry Leck’, *Choral Journal*, 50 (2010), 29–35

———, ‘Perspectives of European Boys about Their Voice Change and School Choral Singing: Developing the Possible Selves of Adolescent Male Singers’, *British Journal of Music Education*, 32 (2015), 87–106

———, ‘Singing and Adolescent Males: An Updated Look at “What Do We Know Now?”’, *Choral Journal*, 63 (2022), 38–49

———, ‘The Successful Transition and Retention of Boys from Middle School to High School Choral Music’, *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 8–17

———, ‘Vocal Health During the Voice Change: Recollections and Recommendations of Collegiate Male Choral Singers’, *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 181 (2022), 181–196

Friar, Kendra Kay, ‘Changing Voices, Changing Times’, *Music Educators Journal*, 86 (1999), 26–29

Friddle, David, ‘Changing Bodies, Changing Voices: A Brief Survey of the Literature and Methods of Working with Adolescent Changing Voices’, *Choral Journal*, 46 (2005), 32–47
Gackle, Lynne, *Finding Ophelia’s Heart: Nurturing the Adolescent Female Voice* (Dayton, Ohio: Heritage Music Press, 2011)

———, ‘The Adolescent Female Voice: Characteristics of Change and Stages of Development’, *Choral Journal*, 31 (1991), 17–25

Garcia, Manuel, *Hints on Singing* (London: Ascherberg, Hopwood and Crew, 1894)

———, *New Treatise on the Art of Singing* (Boston, Massachusetts: Oliver Ditson Company, 1857)

Garnett, Liz, *Choral Conducting and the Construction of Meaning: Gesture, Voice, Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009)

Garrett, Matthew L., ‘Teaching for Transfer: Developing Critical Thinking Skills with Adolescent Singers’, *Choral Journal*, 54 (2014), 24–41

Goddings, Anne-Lise, Burnett Heyes, Stephanie, Bird, Geoffrey, Viner, Russell M. and Blakemore, Sarah-Jayne, ‘The Relationship between Puberty and Social Emotion Processing’, *Journal of Developmental Science*, 15 (2012), 801–811

Graffius, Karen, ‘Cultivating Tone with Your Middle School Choir’*, Choral Journal*, 65 (2025), 6–17

Gumm, Alan, ‘Music Conducting Functions: A Mixed-Methods Evaluation of Theory and Survey Validity’, *Psychomusicology: Music, Mind, and Brain*, 28 (2018), 189–200

———, ‘Six Functions of Conducting: A New Foundation for Music Educators’, *Music Educators Journal*, 99 (2012), 43–49

———, ‘The Development of a Model and Assessment Instrument of Choral Music Teaching Styles’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 41 (1993), 181–199

Harries, Meredydd, Hawkins, Sarah, Hacking Jeremy and Hughes, Ieuan, ‘Changes in the Male Voice at Puberty: Vocal Fold Length and its Relationship to the Fundamental Frequency of the Voice’, *Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, 112 (1998), 451–454

Harrison, Scott, ‘A Perennial Problem in Gendered Participation in Music: What’s Happening to the Boys?’, *British Journal of Music Education*, 24 (2007), 267–280

———, ‘Engaging Boys, Overcoming Stereotypes: Another Look at the Missing Males in Vocal Programs’, *Choral Journal*, 45 (2004), 24–29

Hower, Eileen, ‘Designing a New Paradigm for Selecting Music for the Middle School Choir’, *Choral Journal*, 47 (2006), 62–71, 74

Hunt, Reginald, ‘Singing for Boys: The Adolescent Voice’, *The Musical Times*, 86 (1945), 237–238

Hunt, Thaddeus and Fedynich, LaVonne, ‘Leadership: Past, Present, and Future: An Evolution of an Idea’, *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 8 (2018), 20–26

Jansson, Dag, ‘Musical Leadership: The Choral Conductor as a Sensemaker and Liberator’ (PhD dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music, 2013)

———, Døving, Erik and Elstad, Beate, ‘The Construction of Leadership Practice: Making Sense of Leader Competencies’, *Leadership*, 17 (2021), 560–585

———, ‘Choral Conducting Competences: Perceptions and Priorities’, *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43 (2021), 3–21

Jenkins, John S., ‘The Lost Voice: A History of the Castrato’, *Journal of Paediatric Endocrinology and Metabolism*, 13 (2000), 1503–1508

Kahane, Joel C., ‘A Morphological Study of the Human Prepubertal and Pubertal Larynx’, *American Journal of Anatomy*, 151 (1978), 11–19

Killian, Janice, ‘Perceptions of the Voice-Change Process: Male Adult versus Adolescent Musicians and Non-Musicians’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 45 (1997), 521–535

——— and Wayman, John B., ‘A Descriptive Study of Vocal Maturation Among Male Adolescent Vocalists and Instrumentalists’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 58 (2010), 5–19

———, Wayman, John B. and Antinone, Patrick M., ‘Choral Directors’ Self Report of Accommodations Made for Boys’ Changing Voices: A Twenty Year Replication’, *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 9 (2021), 22–40

Koza, Julia Eklund, ‘Big Boys Don’t Cry (or Sing): Gender, Misogyny, and Homophobia in Collage Choral Methods Text’, *Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning*, 4/5 (1993), 48–64

Leck, Henry, ‘The Boy’s ~~Changing~~ Expanding Voice: Take The High Road’, *Choral Journal*, 49 (2009), 49–60

McKenzie, Duncan, *Training the Boy’s Changing Voice* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1956)

McLeod, Robert (ed.), *A Heritage of Song: A Song Book for Adolescent Boys* (London: J. Curwen and Sons, 1932)

Mellalieu, W. Norman, Whittaker, W. Gilles and Wisemann, Herbert (eds), *The Clarendon Song Books for Boys with Changing Voices* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935)

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, *Junior Cycle Music* (Dublin: An Roinn Oideachais/Department of Education, 2017)

Nichols, Bryan E. and Ashley, Martin, ‘Trends in Young Male Puberty and the Changing Voice: New Dilemmas for Choir Directors’, *American Choral Directors Association*, 62 (2021), 61–64

Ofcom, ‘Online Nation: Report 2025’ (2025) <ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/online-habits/online-nation> [Accessed 9 November 2025]

Parent, Natasha, Dadgar, Kyle, Xiao, Bowen, Hesse, Cassandra and Shapka, Jennifer D., ‘Social Disconnection During COVID-19: The Role of Attachment, Fear of Missing Out, and Smartphone Use’, *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 31 (2021), 748–763

Quinn, Bill, ‘Music Makers: Choir – Recruiting Adolescent Boys for Choir’, *Canadian Music Educators Association*, 45 (2004), 35–37

Rahmani, Hamed, Groot, Wim and Rahmani, Amir Mohammad, ‘Unravelling the NEET Phenomenon: A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-analysis of Risk Factors for Youth Not in Education, Employment, or Training’, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 29 (2024), 1–37

Rante, Bryan, ‘Male Recruitment Strategies for Middle School Chorus’ (DME dissertation, Liberty University School of Music, 2023)

Reigeluth, Christopher S. and Addis, Michael E., ‘Adolescent Boys’ Experiences with Policing of Masculinity: Forms, Functions, and Consequences’, *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 17 (2016), 74–83

Ricciardelli, Lina A., ‘Body Image Development – Adolescent Boys’, in T. F. Cash (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Body Image and Human Appearance* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Academic Press, 2012), 180–186

Roe, Paul F., *Choral Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2nd edn, 1994)

Rosen, Nicole L. and Nofziger, Stacey, ‘Boys, Bullying, and Gender Roles: How Hegemonic Masculinity Shapes Bullying Behaviour’, *Gender Issues*, 36 (2019), 295–318

Rutkowski, Joanne, ‘The Junior High School Male Changing Voice’, *American Choral Journal*, 22 (1981), 11–15

Schmidt, Manuela and Hansson, Erika, ‘Adolescent Boys’ Experiences of Stress — A Focus Group Study’, *BMC Psychology*, 12 (2024)

Shuttleworth, Frank K., ‘The Adolescent Period: A Pictorial Atlas’, *Society for Research in Child Development*, 14 (1949), 1–69

Spencer, Lyle M. and Spencer, Signe M., *Competence At Work: Models for Superior Performance* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 1993)

Stamer, Rick A., ‘Motivation in The Choral Rehearsal’, *Music Educators Journal*, 85 (1999), 26–29

Stapleton, Megan Leigh, ‘The Vocal Pedagogy of the Behnke Family: The Behnke Method’ (DMA dissertation, University of North Texas, 2020)

Stockton, Phillip H., ‘Irvin Cooper (1900-1971) and the Development of the Cambiata Concept for Adolescent Changing Voices’, *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 37 (2015), 75–87

Stupple, Caroline M., ‘The Male Changing Voice: The Student’s Experience’, *Teaching Music*, 15 (2007), 36–41

Surti, Mishall, ‘Changing the Voice of the Choral Classroom’, *Canadian Music Educator*, 50 (2008), 38–40

Swain, Jon, ‘How Young Schoolboys Become Somebody: The Role of the Body in the Construction of Masculinity’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24 (2003), 299–314

Swanson, Frederick, ‘Changing Voices: Don’t Leave Out the Boys’, *Music Educators Journal*, 40 (1984), 47–50

———, *Music Teaching in the Junior High and Middle School* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1973)

———, *The Male Singing Voice Ages Eight to Eighteen* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Igram Press, 1977)

———, ‘The Proper Care and Feeding of Changing Voices’, *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (1961), 63–66

———, ‘When Voices Change: An Experiment in Junior High School Music’, *Music Educators Journal*, 46 (1960), 50–56

Sweet, Bridget, *Thinking Outside the Voice Box: Adolescent Voice Change in Music Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Tanner, James Mourilyan, *Growth at Adolescence: With a General Consideration of the Effects of Hereditary and Environmental Factors Upon Growth and Maturation from Birth to Maturity* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1962)

Thurman, Leon, ‘Boys’ Changing Voices: What Do We Know Now?’, *Choral Journal*, 52 (2012), 8–21

Tikader, Bikram and Kumar Acharya, Amulya, ‘Social Media Addiction in Teenagers – A Critical Review’, *Internal Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10 (2025), 425–427

van Gend, Marie, Matthias, Philip, Scott, Nathan and Allan, Christopher, ‘Australian Adolescent Voices: Rethinking the Choir’, paper presented at the Australian Society for Music Education 21st Annual Conference, Melbourne, 13–15 July 2017

Varvarigou, Maria, ‘Conducting Inclusion: A UDL-Inspired Approach to Choral Education’, *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 47 (2025), 1–22

———, ‘Modelling Effective Choral Conducting Education Through an Exploration of Example Teaching and Learning in England’ (PhD dissertation, University of London, Institute of Education, 2009)

Varvarigou, Maria and Durrant, Colin, ‘Theoretical Perspectives on the Education of Choral Conductors: A Suggested Framework’, *British Journal of Music Education*, 28 (2011), 325–338

Wayman, John, ‘Identification of the Adolescent Male Voice: Unchanged vs. Falsetto’, *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing*, 6 (2018), 66–80

Weed, Donald L., *Reach Your Dreams: An ITM in Introduction to the Alexander Technique* (Bristol: ITM Publications, 2012)

Weiss, D. A., ‘The Pubertal Change of the Human Voice’, *Folia Phoniatrica*, 2 (1950), 125–159

Welch, Graham F., ‘Singing and Vocal Development’, in Gary McPherson (ed.), *The Child as Musician: A Handbook of Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 311–329

White, Christopher D. and White, Donna K., ‘Commonsense Training for Changing Male Voices’, *Music Educators Journal*, 87 (2001), 39–53

Wikstrom, Thomas N., ‘Changing Voices’, *Music Educators Journal*, 48 (1962), 149–151

Williams, Jenevora, *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults* (Braunton, Devon: Compton Publishing, 2nd edn, 2018)

———, Welch, Graham and Howard, David M., ‘Which Sung Pitch Range is Best for Boys during Voice Change?’, *Journal of Voice*, 35 (2021), 581–588

Willis, Elizabeth C. and Kenny, Dianna T., ‘Effect of Voice Change on Singing Pitch Accuracy in Young Male Singers’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, 2 (2008), 111–119

Wilson, Michael, Gwyther, Kate, Swann, Ray, Casey, Kate, Featherston, Ross, Oliffe, John L., Englar-Carlson, Matt and Rice, Simon M., ‘Operationalizing Positive Masculinity: A Theoretical Synthesis and School-Based Framework to Engage Boys and Young Men’, *Health Promotion International,* 37 (2022)

Wis, Ramona, *The Conductor as Leader: Principles of Leadership Applied to Life on the Podium* (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2007)

Wong, Naima T., Zimmerman, Marc A. and Parker, Edith A., ‘A Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment for Child and Adolescent Health Promotion’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46 (2010), 100–114

Wood, Henry J., *The Gentle Art of Singing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930)
Young, Anthony, 'The Adolescent Male Changing Voice: Physiological, Psychological and Practical Considerations for Classroom Music Teachers', *Australian Kodaly Journal* (2012), 37–45

Appendix A

Ethical approval documents for interviews: Participant information leaflets

Voices for Change: Effective Choral Leadership for Adolescent Male Singers

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask any questions if something you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT
My name is Brian Murphy. I am a doctoral student at the Royal Irish Academy of Music. I am required to submit a dissertation. This research addresses the well-documented issue of declining male participation in youth choirs during puberty, focusing on how conductors can better support boys through vocal change. It aims to develop a model, encompassing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge needed for conducting choirs that include boys experiencing voice change. The study seeks to bridge gaps between existing research and practical application in choral leadership.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?
Taking part will involve your participation in a one-to-one online interview with me. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. During the semi-structured interview, we will discuss your background and education, your approach to including changing voices in your choirs, and your thoughts on the participation of boys in choral singing in Ireland. You will be provided with the topics to be discussed no later than one week before the interview. During the interview, a recording will be taken to assist me in capturing the data. This recording will be maintained in a password-protected folder. There may be a need for a short follow-up interview to clarify some of your points.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?
You have been invited to take part as you are an experienced choral conductor who has a demonstrated track record in working with adolescent boys in Ireland.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?
Participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation, refuse to answer a question, and you can withdraw from the study at any time before your interview or up to one week after. To ensure the project stays on schedule and because your data will be anonymised soon after the interview, transcripts will not be returned for review. However, you are welcome to clarify or add to your comments during or immediately after the interview. After one week, your interview may already have been anonymised and included in the analysis. At that stage, therefore, it will not be possible to identify and remove your individual contribution.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?
There is no benefit for the participants in taking part, other than an opportunity to reflect on your professional practice. I do not foresee any possible physical or psychological

harm that may come to you as a result of participating in the research. This research stands to benefit the choral community more broadly by providing an outline of the competencies required to support young male singers during voice change, encouraging more research into this area and informing best practice.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

Your contribution will be anonymised, and a pseudonym will be assigned to you, ensuring that your participation will be confidential. Though your choral activities will be described, no names will be used, and all efforts will be made to ensure that any identifying information (relating to you or others) is eliminated. Non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings will be collected and retained in a password-protected folder for one year after the degree is conferred.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Signed consent forms, original recordings and full transcripts will be retained in a security-protected Microsoft 365 folder until one year after my degree has been conferred. After this time, all will be destroyed.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

Following the submission of my dissertation, I intend to disseminate my research through the usual academic channels, including at conferences, in published articles, on TCD's TARA Institutional Repository.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Researcher Brian Murphy brianmurphy@riam.ie
Supervisor Denise Neary deniseneary@riam.ie

Appendix B

Ethical approval documents for interviews: Consent form

Voices for Change: Effective Choral Leadership for Adolescent Male Singers

- I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time before or during the interview or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview up to one week after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I understand that the researcher may contact me for a follow-up interview to clarify some points made during the initial interview.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves an interview with the researcher about my professional practice.
- I understand that my information will be anonymised and any identifying information (of myself or others) will be redacted.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that anonymised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- I understand that signed consent forms, recordings and full transcripts will be retained in a password-protected Microsoft 365 folder, which will be accessible to the researcher only. All will be deleted one year after the degree is conferred.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of the participant:_____ Date: _____

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

Signature of the researcher: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Brian Murphy brianmurphy@riam.ie
Supervisor Denise Neary deniseneary@riam.ie

Appendix C

Ethical approval documents for interviews: List of indicative topics

Conductors for Change: Effective Choral Leadership for Adolescent Male Singers

Topics for Discussion

1. Background
    - Your education and training
    - Your professional background in choral conducting
2. Professional Practice
    - Specific experience with adolescent male singers
    - Tasks and responsibilities
3. Challenges and Successes
    - Challenges that you have encountered
    - Memorable successes or moments of growth
4. Key Qualities of Effective Conductors
    - Personal traits or skills that you believe are essential
    - Advice for new or aspiring conductors in this field
5. Your Thoughts
    - The participation of boys in choirs in Ireland
    - The future of adolescent male participation in choral singing

Appendix D
Interview Transcript – Andrew

Brian: So good morning, Andrew, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male, adolescent voice change. And to begin the interview, I'd love to hear maybe a little bit about your own choral experience as a singer, and also your own experience of voice change when you were a boy going through voice change.

Andrew: Okay, I remember very little about my own voice changing. I do remember loving to sing when I was small and I was, we were quite a musical family. Everybody, you know, had their own opinions on what they liked, and country and Western, and all of that was all kind of big in the family, but my parents also had a collection of records with John McCormick and Richard Tauber, and those sort of voices, but I liked, I think, particularly to my mother singing in church, and I love singing as a child. And then my voice did change. I kind of remember being very disappointed at how limited it was that I could. You know I couldn't go very high without it, you know, without a lot of effort, I couldn't do what I could do with it before. But then I don't seem to remember too much. It just seemed to settle down into something different, and I think, from you know, from being in school we were always singing. I like, I was away in boarding school with the brothers, and we always sang, you know, in church, at masses, at benedictions, at services and concerts. So, we were always kind of singing. I think you know. And then, from my own point of view, I think when I was in fifth year, I lived in [named accommodation], now the [named building]. I lived there for fifth year. It was a fabulous year for me musically, and I had a choir there. There were about twenty-four of us there in that programme, and I had the choir. I trained them and taught them.

Brian: You were in fifth year?

Andrew: When I was in fifth year, and also taught myself to play the harmonium and play the piano kind of badly. I used to come into [named teacher] for lessons, and one of the

big things I did was I played the cathedral organ on a Sunday morning when he was on holidays, and that was a huge thing for me at the time.

Brian: Incredible. Wow! That's incredible. And that's in [named part of Ireland], is it?

Andrew: That's in [named part of Ireland]. Yeah. But here in the school where I teach and where I've taught all my life, and where I went to school for me leaving cert, we have quite a fine Ingram organ that's been here since about 1890. So, tracker organ, so interesting instrument. And we got a bit of work done on a former student of ours, [named teacher] did a lot of work on renovating it in the last year, particularly so it's back working, and we're charmed.

Brian: Great, and the next thing I'd like to ask you is about your professional background in choral conducting, and any like formal education that you had in choral conducting, and as part of that, and maybe how the training prepared you to work with boys who are going through voice change.

Andrew: To be honest, I really have no professional kind of training in in working with choirs other than what I've kind of picked up over all of the years what I've learned and what I've learned on courses also here in Ireland and in England, with the Association British choral directors which I used to be a member would attend their conferences every summer. So, from events like that, would have gone to the, to the to the choral conducting conference down in [named area], when [named teacher] used to run it way back in the in [named time period], and I did a conducting course with them on one on one occasion, largely because I was conducting in the light opera festival. Here I was conducting our school musical, went into the [named festival], and I kind of felt I needed a bit of help. As a result, I won the conductor's award for that particular year. I think it was [named year]. But anyway, I but that's really, it's only kind of in ways like that. I never studied for a year, or for years, or under any kind of eminent people. It's just whatever I've kind of picked up, really myself, and I see on little courses.

Brian: And in terms of those courses. How did they prepare you for working with adolescents going through voice change, or did they? Did they at all?

Andrew: Not really, except one of them. When I was quite young I was still only kind of maybe [named age] I went. I used to go in a couple of times into [named church] in [named area] when [named teacher] was there, just to listen to them, rehearsing because I particularly liked that. You know that kind of boy's sound at that time. It was something that I just loved, the kind of pure quality of it, and King's College, and all of that. So, I went in. I have a great memory of them doing Stanford's Magnificat. Wasn't it? Stanford's magnificent, or was it? Stanford's the Lord's my Shepherd? I'm yeah. No. The Magnificat by Stanford. Yeah. And then later I went. I did a similar thing. When I was in college I went to a similar course, or I attached myself to the [named church] and I went there, and [named choral conductor], former director of the [named choir]. [Named conductor] was there at the time with working with that choir, and my memory of that they were doing they were doing Byrd's. Ave Verum, and I will never forget it, and the sound of it. So I there were things I did, and now that I think about it I did summer courses with, in plain chant and polyphony with Hans Waldemar Rosen, and a monk from Selem, Jean Claire from Selem for a couple of summers up in Dalgan Park, I think maybe at least two or three summers, and they were very significant in terms of introducing me to Bruckner, and to chant, and things like that, and to all sorts of ways of singing better, which I found really helpful like. For example, when we were humming, he would say, you know, mostly if people are humming, and you'll hear people sometimes on records go. Hmm! And they'll you know they'll brace their lips, and that'll all be very forced. And I still say to the kids I mean Hans said to us 'you hum like you're smelling a rose or hose', as he would have said with this big German accent! So, you'd hum and so. But so, it changes like you're smelling the rose, and you get a whole different, a whole relaxed you know, kind of head and mouth, and everything is very relaxed when you're home that way, and it's so much more pleasing. And you can home a lot better. So, I yeah, I learned all sorts of things like that. I really did.

Brian: In terms of like specifically related to voice change. So, I just really want to focus in on that. Were any of the courses that you did. Did they have elements the way to talk about voice chat?

Andrew: No, the only thing I remember about voice change, and it's not specifically about voice change, but about boys, which was what I was working with was on one of

our courses in [named area], where whoever was leading it I don't know, was it [named teacher]? But I have a feeling it wasn't him who said boys, the configuration of a boy's skull is completely different to that of a girl's, and for that reason they produce sound in a completely different way. So, when the conductor says, 'boys, why can't you sing like the girls? You're useless'. It's such a wrong thing to say, because the boys shouldn't be singing like the girls. In the first instance, they sing in a completely different way. And also, I think, what I learned from that was that the repertoire that is likely to appeal to boys is quite different from what you might present to girls, but in terms of specific you know, been trained in that? No, it would have been whatever I might have learned, and whatever I learned was that there are probably a couple of things involved. One is that they're the physiological things that are happening to their to, you know.

Brian: Exactly. I think I think that's going to come later. Sweet.

Andrew: All right.

Brian: Move on, will we?

Andrew: Okay. Yeah.

Brian: Great thanks. Thanks so much. Okay, so the next section is going to be professional practices. And in this section, I'd like to talk about a few different things, and the first one is choirs that you've worked with, past and present? So just to list some of the choirs that you've worked with past and present?

Andrew: Yeah, the very, very first choir I had was a choir of young males, all aged probably at that time between, we were in fifth year up as far as six years, so probably between. And we had done a spiritual year in between. So, we were probably all between seventeen and nineteen. So, working with that group, who love to sing in a full, bodied sort of way, I think that was one of the early things I learned about men. They like to belt it out, and, you know, get into the singing when they're singing. That was the very first, I worked with those over a two-year period during fifth year and Sixth year. I had one when I was in my first year in college was in [named college], so I had a little choir there,

that it again would sing on a Sunday morning. My biggest memory of that was when we decided to do an our father, that the community in [named college], the community in the [named religious order] objected to is, they thought it was a little bit avant garde, a little bit too lively for their liking, and being the rebel that I probably was then, I decided with the young [named religious order] that if I, on the organ loft several feet above everybody, quite a high organ off to [named area]. I could start it on the organ. There's no way they could stop it if the boys joined in. So, we did, and I was thereafter banned from playing the organ. And yeah, that's another story where I told I told them what they could do with the organ. But then, I went on. From that I was involved with a choir in [named college] when I was there. In the meantime, I only did a year of training teacher training. I didn't like it. And then I had a choir that sang on TV. The next year little four-part choir made up of first to third years, and we did a Palestrina mass, and we sang that on TV. I think [named year]. Then I went to college, and I was involved with the college where they sang in it, and I also, after a year or two, became the male tutor for the male section. And then, when I came here to [named part of Ireland], I started a choir, and that was [named year]. So, I've had choirs here in the school ever since. Initially an SATB choir which became a really big choir, was maybe 120 kids in it or more at one point. And then I was away in leadership for a couple of years, and when I came back I set up again with the SATB choir, but also then in the in the millennium year, we started, you know, partly with me, encouraging the boys, the boys at the time set up a male voice choir, and it was really for the older ones.

Brian: I think I think a lot of this is going to come up later. I think, where I think you're going to go. If that's okay. Yeah, this section is just really naming the choirs that you have. And then I think we'll probably talk about them in more detail later. If that's okay?

Andrew: Yeah. And the only other thing I might add with words was then probably maybe fifteen or more years ago, probably maybe twenty years ago I joined a choir that was set up largely through teachers and adults here in [named part of Ireland]. A number of them in our school, it's now led by a girl who's just retired from our staff music teacher and called the [named choir]. So I joined those and sang. I've sung with them. I'm still a member, even though I'm not a performing member, because I don't have the time

to commit. But I but I do from time to time, would sing with them, you know, and I, and up to a couple of years ago I sang with them full time.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant, brilliant, fantastic. So, the next thing I was hoping to talk about are, what were the tasks, or what are the tasks and responsibilities that you had when working with these adolescent boy singers?

Andrew: Well, I think the first task was to get a group. The first task was to recruit to, recruit students. I saw always as my main task, because I wasn't presented with the choir, so the choir was my interest, and I was the one who set it up, but then I had to also maintain it. I still do that, even though I'm not strictly kind of teaching in school, but like that for me is a key thing. I've worked with people who said, 'I don't beg'. I think I spent all my life begging. I go around to the kids. If I get to know the kids at all, I'd say, 'hey, you should join the choir, what about?' And so on, not for me. And you know. I would also say to the boys that are in the choir, I said, 'lads, you got to go out and recruit. You got to get people in here go out and get your mates and your friends.' So I think that for me is probably the very first thing, because without people you can wave your hands all you want, but there's nothing so for me, I think, in a boys school, I think that that you know hands on recruitment and looking for fellas, and asking them and begging them and pleading with them and encouraging them, is a key part. It's a key task for me.

Brian: And if you were to put the labels on that, like the skills required for that, kind of leadership motivator, those kind of things?

Andrew: Yeah, it's it is. It's all of that. It's all of that. Now that kind of comes a bit later when you get them in. But the specific. It's a marketing job. It's a marketing job full stop. It's, you know, I've always felt as long as I've been here, and I used to envy people in the in the woodwork department and the and the, you know the mechanical drawing as it was when I started music first, and they'd have. They'd have so many classes that oh, we're full. We can only take, you know, forty, with only three classes, and here was poor Andrew, you know, with the two or three that might take music, so I always felt I was like the small shop down to the corner trying to get people in and people saying, Well, we're also we're up to Tesco. Why wouldn't we be going to SuperValu and all the rest?

And I've spent my whole life like that. I was never the one that were flocking into. But although I did build up music pretty successfully, we ended up with two classes even for leaving cert we had two classes, but it just takes kind of work and a commitment. It's a marketing job where you have to go out. And really you know that that for me is the starting point, because you can have all of the most wonderful, as I said to you the last day you know I had, I worked with people along the way where I couldn't get students into them as quick as they were losing them. So like, you know, the first job is to actually get the kids in. That's the first task.

Brian: Yeah, I think this is going to come up later, this this topic here, if it's okay, if I can move on, I can go back to other tasks and responsibilities.

Andrew: Responsibilities. Okay, yeah. Well, then, I think I think if you ask me the second thing. I think this, that and I go through, I'll name all of these, and then you can. You can pull me back on the recordings you want. I think the second thing is to choose a programme that is likely to be interesting for the kids and also interesting for yourself as the person who's trying to deliver it. It has, like it has to be music that excites me, and then I think in turn, I got to be able to excite them about and like I've gone to Cork and seen, I remember one year a sister, and she was up, God help her, and God help the kids all the more! And, as I said, first years in their long trousers, and she was doing Seoithin Seo with them and I remember thinking, 'Oh, my God!' And you could see them looking down at their doors and saying, 'when we'll be at will, we be out of here', you know, whereas my kids would be up, and it's kind of like we're here, and you know we want to deliver. So, I think music that excites and would be my, my would be my next thing. I think my next thing after that is how can you, then how can you then put that together? Because in part music, it's you know it. It's like, building a house. It's you're putting something together. There are different strands and different places or parts. And one of the things I learned early on is the value of sectionals. So having people with you who can take sections and using part of your rehearsal for that, and then bringing them all back together before the end of the rehearsal, even if it's only for five, six, seven minutes and letting them hear what that overall thing is like, because if they're just singing a line they can. 'Oh, this is not great', but when they hear it in parts they think, 'Wow! That's wonderful'. And so it's that it's that sense of letting them hear what they sound like in

parts. So that I think I think, structuring the rehearsals so that that kind of progress can be made, that and that you're not there just doing one line, and the others are all thrown paper airplanes or climbing on the [named area]. And you're kind of, you know you're giving out, and they're fed up that they're all disasters. So that would be my second task would be to ensure that you had an interesting rehearsal, first of all, an interesting repertoire that you had something interesting to say or to communicate. Second thing is that you worked on it in an interesting way, that it, you know that, like the kids will learn a line, and they'll work on all of that. They're fine once they're doing something the whole time. But don't leave them sitting there for more than half a minute, doing nothing and twiddling their thumbs because they just get fed up, and they won't be interested, and they won't want to come back.

Brian: Any other responsibilities that you feel. You have to the boys going through voice change?

Andrew: Yeah, I think, my, yeah, I of course, a responsibility that I feel I have now that I didn't mention at all is the safeguarding is the safeguarding issue. I mean, when I started with that was not an issue. You never thought of it, but nowadays you do. So, I would rarely be, you know, like I might have a sectional group on my own, but when the whole choir comes together there are always other teachers or adults there with me. So I think, and I think that that the boys, feeling that this environment is safe, and that if they have something to say or something to complain about, they can be heard. I think they're really important things nowadays. But looking at the purely musical things in terms of their voice changing, no, I really don't. I don't. I try not to highlight that as this is going to be a big issue, because I kind of felt when I was kind of young it this was kind of like a major issue and I remember a wonderfully musical [named teacher], saying to me on one occasion, that sometimes in in Italy and in different countries, a person's voice could change overnight. It was, you know, that literally overnight, they went from being up there down to down there, you know that that didn't kind of happen as much in Ireland, but that it could go on for a couple of years, and it just seemed like such a hard and negative thing. So I think at a certain point I kind of thought, no, I'm not going to draw attention to that. I don't, and so I don't draw attention to it at all, and I just let the boys sing, and if the boys say to me, I'm finding it really hard to get up to those notes. Now I'll

sort of say, ‘okay, let’s wait. We’re finished our next concert or our next competition, and I’ll move you down to the tenor twos or baritones.’ ‘You’ll find it easier there’, and I’d always sort of say, look, don’t, ‘don’t panic about this now, this is not a big deal. All of our voices change, so just go gently, sing what you can and stay very relaxed about it’ and they just tend to know themselves in whatever way they know. They just kind of come up and say, ‘I’m not comfortable with that kind of anymore. Can I move down?’ And probably now, the older guys were saying to me recently that we probably should at the beginning of this year do a voice test, and the voice test will be more like what I said to you the last day, where I’ll give them a stave going from, you know, kind of from base right up to right up to the to the tenor, and I get them to mark what their, what their range is.

Brian: Yeah. And I’ll probably talk about this a little bit more in Section four.

Andrew: Okay, have I covered all the responsibilities? There? Were there other ones that.

Brian: That sounds really good to me. I think you gave some really interesting answers. There, so that’s yeah.

Andrew: Yeah, I really. And I really do mean that, because, like, unless you have those sort of things. You know, you kind of like, I dread a rehearsal where I’m only going to be on my own because I feel I’m going to be boring them, and like I could lose ones because of that. And so you really have to be attentive to that. It’s not good enough to go in on an evening and sort of say right. Well, look! Our tenor two tutor is not here, so I will do it all in four parts. It’s just a really to be avoided like the plague, I think you know, until such time as they can sing in four parts, and then that’s what you want all the time, or eight parts, or whatever. You don’t want to be breaking them up at that point. But until they have learned lines, it’s really it’s I think a retrograde move to put them all together and try and teach lines separately. I definitely feel that.

Brian: That that makes a lot of sense. And is it possible to move on to the next section? Which is challenges and successes. So the first thing I’d like to talk about is if you could describe a challenge, or if you could describe challenges that you have encountered when

working with adolescent male singers going through voice change? So these can be music or non-musical challenges.

Andrew: Well to get the non-musical ones, maybe out of the way first, like in an all-boys, school, people would presume that singing for boys would be would be a no go area. I have to be honest and say that [named area] in particular, is a really musical place, and a place when I came here. If I was to be honest, people sometimes say I kind of did a lot for music and [named area]. The reality is, I came to a town where there was wonderful music going on, and like, if I look back under the great show, bands of you know the [named band], and all of those they were all here. We had the [named bands] were also here. We had the [named festival] here. We had, prior to that, a [named festival]. We had the [named festival] here, so music was being made by males in this town when I came here very, very successfully, so I never found it. That, you know, was that it was that difficult boys would say to me in the school, and that's not my thing. But there's no I don't that that's different from a bias where you know that's a girly thing. My feeling about music in the school here particularly is that, and possibly in the town, but certainly in our school, is that we have over [named amount of students] in our school, and I would say there are very, very few of them who don't look up to the choir and when the choir sings for them sings for every year group at Christmas, the full [named amount of students], or most of them, they are brought up to the church in year groups of maybe one hundred to 150, 200 kids at a time, and the choir sings for them, you know, carols with bands, and it's, you know, [named song], and [named song], and you know, a good variety of music, including the organ last year, which we played again for the first time. Those kids really love that. And a fellow said to me one year I met him at Christmas, said, 'You know what I miss most about [named school] at Christmas, he said, it's the Christmas Mass'. The Christmas mass is the carol service. This is a guy who would have played got an all-Ireland medal in soccer for our school came from a big family of soccer players, so the kids look up to the choir. They admire them. They might want to do it themselves, but they admire them, and you know, and I know that they would be usually admired. So, I think that's the first thing to say it's still, it's still. You still have to work at getting them into the choir.

Brian: Can I jump in just for one second? Is it possible to just really bring this back to challenges and successes? Specifically? Is it possible to start with challenges that you've had just to give specific examples of challenges that you've had working with adolescent male voices, music and non-music.

Andrew: Yeah, well they're the non-music challenges that that I put here there. Yeah, that that. And they and they're going to be there now for everybody. I think. That there isn't this, perhaps the same acceptance that a boy would join a choir that a girl would. So, I think that was the point I was making. Yeah. And with regard to the musical challenges, I think maybe less so now but certainly when I started it, it was to kind of it was to it would have been, how do you use your voice as an instrument? Right? And one of the things I when I listen to boys singing one of the things that I often think I'd love to get that group. I'd love to be with them because a lot of teachers, and this is something I learned very early on. Maybe ever before I went to college. I think I was only maybe [named age] when I used to read books quite a lot about choir, because I was very interested as a younger man and one of the things was, don't ever teach a scale going, because all you're doing is you're dragging up the chest voice up into the head. Much better start, and then you start from the head and then extend that upwards. So that, things like that. And more recently, what I learned in my time, maybe the last twenty years, is that an image that I use, I think, very successfully with choirs, and recently I use it with my adult choir in the parish who kept singing flat. Was I kept saying to them. 'you need to go into a different gear'. I said, right, you all drive cars mostly, and I'm not an automatic, but you know most of us have geared cars. So, you get people singing and like, that's like you're driving at thirty, but you're still in first. So, you need to slot that in, and then it's so much easier to do that. So, change the gear, and I'll be saying 'so there's your forehead, your skull kind of up around here for those notes, and then there's the ball, the chest, and I use the image of the sternum.' That big bone, I tell them. Sing, use that bone to project if you're a bass, but equally so I get them, and using the gear analogy to, and they get that. So, I don't think that's as much. But if I was working with a new group, I think I'd be starting with a lot of that.

Brian: So, this is this is what you would view as a challenge with adolescent boys changing gears, changing to different areas of your voice? Okay.

Andrew: Because automatically, if I when I listen to groups singing, and I say very often, I'd love to just have a half an hour with them because they go, and it's all in here, and you're just, you know. I would change it, probably to softer singing. I've also learned that softer works better in the beginning, but I'd also change the gears, and it's very doable to do it.

Brian: Perfect, brilliant.

Andrew: So that that would be. But that's not the only challenge right. I'd have, I think, then the huge challenge for me. Now I say with them, with the lower notes, I use the notion of the sternum, and a good bass is very important for tuning in any choir, but particularly in the male voice choir. It's key, so I do use the idea of the sternum. I tell them to think about that big bone, and to sing through the big bone for their lower notes, because quite often they'll sing up here, you have nothing. Equally, well for me, tenors in a male voice choir whose voices are still changing to sing high notes is forever a challenge. It's forever a challenge. And one of the things I wrote a piece of an infamous piece, but it's been done quite a bit in the [named festival] by different groups called [named composition] and I wrote that piece specifically, having got leathered in so many competitions where we came last, and people saying, 'oh! the tone was rough, and there were this, and there were that.' I think it was my sister who's [a named profession]. She's saying to me one time, well, 'you should work to your strengths.' You know things that you think. And I said, 'well, let's go with really soft singing'. So, I wrote that piece around really soft dynamics and around, you know, kind of pitches that I thought they could sing, but that they would never be strained, and that it would always say on the page that they were singing very softly.

Brian: We'll have a section on repertoire in the next section which I'd be really interested to hear your views on that, like specifically good examples of repertoire for changing voices.

Andrew: Okay. But probably all I'm saying is that you know, keeping the, you know. Well, the challenge is our pitches. Two challenges. Pitches for higher notes for tenors is a real challenge, and I think will always be a challenge. But particularly changing voices,

and the other challenge would be to sing softly. It's an important thing to do rather than singing loudly, because you can't hear yourself, and it's very hard to tune.

Brian: Fantastic. They are brilliant answers there. And so any other challenges. I want to move on to successes or positive moments that you've had?

Andrew: Well, they would for me be the main challenges that I'd feel I'd be meeting every day when I'd you know, when I would work with the choir. I'm sure other people have other ones, but for me they would be the things to get them to sing in tune, I think is always a challenge, and for me would be is a major thing, and I think in that regard I still think that there's nothing better than solfa, if you're having a problem.

Brian: Okay, brilliant, fantastic. And so in terms of like success stories or positive moments, if you'd be able to share some memorable successes or moments of growth that you experienced while working with adolescent male singers.

Andrew: Yeah, I suppose. I suppose, I mean, there've been lots like you. You probably think when you think of these, of things like the competition kind of things that we would have won particularly we won the all-Ireland. I think it was about [named year] of us ended up in [named venue] and sang the [named work]. But we had a big choir about 120, and we also did the [named work].

Brian: One thing sorry, but I'd love to relate this directly to the adolescent, changing voice of success stories that you've had within your choir, with maybe boys going through voice change.

Andrew: Okay, not so much the competition? Well, I suppose for me the biggest success would be the fact that you know we were able to put a programme together successfully. They could sing successfully in parts and win competitions. Look, I think, just getting them to be able to sing pieces of music of that calibre and that standard, I think, and to sing them well, I would have thought for me would have been probably. Yeah, that would. That would have been for me just a big success in getting them to that point, and also sometimes doing some contemporary repertoire things that I've written myself, but

things written as well by other people for them. I think they were. I would have regarded that as a success, because sometimes I think boys are probably more comfortable with kind of tonal music. Music that all kind of fits together in a way that their ears understand as opposed to trying to negotiate distances. It takes a little bit more time.

Brian: I think. Well for me, just having seen your choir a few times, that the real striking thing every time I see them is just the sheer amount of them on stage. And also how proud they look to be in the choir. They're the two things that instantly, before I even hear them. It's just incredible to see the sheer amount of them that you get on stage of boys who really want to be there and really want to sing, and they always look like they're kind of wearing the uniform with pride to go and.

Andrew: Absolutely.

Brian: That to me is a massive success before they even sing a note.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, you're right. I mean, I think the numbers of them are good, and we'd love more. We're always looking for more, but they certainly have pride. I mean I would have it. I think they would pick that up for me. I'd be hugely proud of them you know, and of us as a team. But also, I think, what they have, and I constantly say to them, I would want them always to be confident and feel they're as good as anybody else, but not to be cocky and you know nobody likes people, or cocky or arrogant, but and I would never want them to be like that, but I would want them to be confident in themselves, and to believe in themselves, and to feel why not? I'm as good as anybody else around here. I that they would, and that would be probably a big success actually more important than, and I often would say that when we wouldn't win a competition. Listen! You sang great you were. You gave it everything. It was, you know, and I would always say I'm proud of them. So yeah, I think those for me would be big successes. And then, because you mentioned the last, and it dawned on me about a lad, a particular lad who joined the choir in first year. He was very, very quiet and very shy and then he left and then he came back again, maybe second year or third year, and again he left, and he came back in TY, and I said to him, I said, [named child], are you going to stay now this time? Oh, yeah, definitely said, I'm going to stay. So he went into the show.

Comes from quite a musical family, but his dad is [named profession], and he's a very bright young full of this land. So he went into the show and he got the. He got a leading part in [named show], singing [named song], and a leading part in [named musical]. And he's related this story himself at the Feis Ceoil when he won a prize there last year one of my great memories was sitting at the back. I always sit at the back of the hall, just keeping an eye on the kids and listening to him, singing to [named song] and the tears coming into my eyes, because all I could remember was he was so shy and so quiet. You know you could blow him over if you said anything he was, and here he was, with this big voice, fabulous voice, and I think he was. He either is at the moment or will be in [named venue] singing [named composer] with [named person] there have leading parts in it with an orchestra and a show he's preparing for at the moment. And there are lots of those sort of stories, I suppose, of, but particularly the quiet ones, the ones who kind of were so quiet and shy, and the other one, I think, just, I'll finish with this, and there's a little story I wrote about this, was, we was having lads with special needs of the choir. We had a lad last year, and I would have to dumb him down, and I had a I had a fella on, and marking him kind of saying, you know, if he gets too loud, just sort of say, look, a bit quieter, and I have another one now. He just started with me last year, and I have somebody on him as well. And but again, you know, it's good for him. It's really good for him to be part of it, and like I would feel that's as much my duty as just sort of saying, 'oh, you're not great', like the guy I have at the moment. I'm not too sure. 'Can he sing at all or not?' So, I'm not, but, like, on the other hand, I know it would be so wrong to go to him and tell him he couldn't be part of the choir.

Brian: Yeah, yeah, amazing.

Andrew: So that they'd be successes as well.

Brian: Fantastic. For time, I might just move on. Is that okay?
Andrew: Yeah, yeah.

Brian: The next section, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors specifically working with young male voices. And to

start with, what, in your view, are the traits or skills you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change?

Andrew: Yeah, I think I think, patience is the first one. I think you need to just be very, very patient. I think you need to be very understanding. Okay. So, if somebody, because sometimes I have learned this as well, sometimes when children's voices are breaking, they're not able to zoom into what the pitch is that that's you know that the choir is singing in, or that the particular line is singing. They can't get in there because, you know the voice is all messed up. So you got to be very, very, very patient and I would never say that to them, even if I you know, if the odd time we kind of might be at the piano, and you play notes and you go. Oh, and you know, and I sort of say, 'okay, and now let's try this one', and you know. So I wouldn't say, 'hey, that's a disaster, you know you can't sing'. I you know. So I need to be very patient, very understanding. And eventually they tune in for ninety-nine percent of them tune in and find where it is that they are in in the choir. That's been my experience over my lifetime. They tune in eventually, and so I think. You know, I just need to be, need to be very, very patient.

Brian: Any other, any other traits or skills that you think are essential for working with adolescent boys?

Andrew: Yeah, I think I think to be creative in the way in which you know you put them into a part, and that you're you know your understanding, and you know you're able to say right, well, look, let's move you over here. This might suit you better. You know. I think not to be so rigid. Oh, well, we know we only have four. You have to either get in tenor one or clear off. It can't be so rigid is that you? You know you got to be. You have to be creative, and there's some place where they can sing. So trying to get them to kind of move there, or put them into that, and in as in as gentle and as positive a way from their point of view as possible. You know, because if it looks like you're just shoving them into something else, they'll get it. It's not good for them. It's not good for their confidence I feel. So, and it's the point where is it the person, or is it the choir? And maybe it's the person.

Brian: Yeah.

Andrew: Well, the choir kind of comes out of the people rather than the other way around. So yeah. But in terms of working with them. I mean, I think I probably have expressed most of it already. I think, having an exciting programme, having a programme that you like, and that you're pretty well certain they like. And you have to be. You know, you need to be, I think, tuned in to get that right.

Brian: Related to that. What advice would you have for new or aspiring conductors, working with adolescent, changing voices.

Andrew: Well, I, I've said them. I think already. I think my first advice is I you know. Can you enthuse people? Second advice is, can you pick music that they like? Third advice is, are you going to be able to deliver that in a way that they will like? That'll be successful. And I do think that by working with other conductors particularly. There are two sides of this. I think, working with people who can help you with skills of conducting so that maybe your beat is more clear that that you just don't end up just waving hands, that you're able to listen to the singers, maybe a lot more than whatever you might do with your hands. And then how do you respond to that? I mean clearly, if they're going flat or they've lost their line, how can you? How can you respond to an accident that's happening? You know. What can you do? I think those sort of things, and also working with this cohort, if it's if it's adolescent voices that are changing, and I believe that's true of girls as well that their voices also change. And then how do you? You know you need to have some bit of experience of working with that particular group, because it's very, very different from working with an adult choir, where their voices are settled.

Brian: That's fantastic, brilliant. The next section I was hoping to ask you a few kind of just direct questions you can give like reasonably short answers, if you want. The first one is about repertoire selection. So I know you've talked about this very briefly in a previous question. But what do you think are the important aspects of choosing repertoire for changing voices?

Andrew: Yeah, I am. Funny enough, I think it's the music itself, rather than the era actually. And sometimes the kids kind of would believe, maybe you know that. Oh, well,

why aren't, and not so much the kids in the choir? Because I think over the years we've done fairly good music that they've enjoyed. But kids outside of the choir might think, 'oh, you know, why aren't you kind of doing the latest pop song or stuff like that?' And I have no problem with that doing that. In TY, for example, we'd have a TY choir. We used to have it. It has stopped in the last two years, much to my great disappointment, but that was just to sing along everybody. We'd have two or three classes come together, we'd have a band, and we do all sorts of things kind of popular songs, mainly, you know, but ones from might go back to the Beatles, or stuff like that, but songs that I would think would work for them is just as chorus, shouting out. With the choir now, if I'm picking repertoire for the choir, it needs to engage them. So, whether it's sixteenth century, or whether it's twentieth century, or whether it's a popular song, and this is very hard to describe, and I think I'm pretty good at it, in terms of them. I have to say, the first thing is, do I like it? Is it something that I would really like doing? and some pieces, I just wouldn't. And I say, no, I wouldn't. I wouldn't really like teaching that. I get no excitement whatever out of. I find it dull, I think, for boys it needs to be a mixture. One of the things with male voices I found is that, and maybe all males is that they like a bit of sentiment. You know we do a thing called [named composition], quite a sentimental piece, really, and the lads love it, and they love the chords, and they love the feeling, and they love the emotion of it. Right? And last year, with the [named composition], they really love that they like the close harmony. I think equally well. They love a bit of rhythm. This year we're doing a thing called [named piece] with the clicking, and they love it. They're all ready. You can feel they're into it. So, it's a mixture. I think you need some lively things because they're young, and they like a nice rhythm that speaks to them that give, you know, last year we did. We did that song from South Pacific, 'nothing like a dame'. Ah, they loved it, and they, you know, they loved the accompaniment, and all of that, and the speed of it, the rhythms. Equally well, they love a bit of sentiment, as you say, so I think it's music. Look, I don't know. You might like something totally different from me. But I'm this year I'm doing with [named composition], and I know they're going to love it like we started it, and they're going to love it. I'm equally doing a setting of queen in the dream world which I've done for them myself, and we've just started it. And I think they're going to like that for different reasons. Kind of very slow, and has some slides and. So, look, I think the music in its own right has to say something to you,

and sometimes I listen to music, and I say, I'd no more do that, you know, and they'd be bored to tears id feel but maybe it's me.

Brian: No, that's fantastic, really, really excellent. And the next question is, how do you approach assigning appropriate voice parts to boys going through voice change?

Andrew: Yeah. Well, I was saying to you earlier on, probably when we get them all together in September, when they'll all be there, I think we'll sit down with the stave, and I and I'll you know I'll have all the notes, and I kind of have them all named. So, this is exactly where we are now on your stave, so they'll be able to follow up and down, so sing along, and when you cut out when it's gone too high for you, just put an X around that, and then same thing going down when you just you can't go anymore.

Brian: One thing, I think. Just am I right in saying that you're actively giving them knowledge about their own voice by doing that?

Andrew: Oh, totally, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, totally. And I said, Look. And I would say to them, when we're doing that, I'd say, Now, guys, some of you may have a very small little range, and that's perfectly normal and natural. So don't be worrying if you can only go from Middle C up as far as A, G, maybe even less. You may only have a little range, and that's fine, because these old vocal cords are all getting kind of thicker, and that's going to take a bit of time for some people to have this quicker. And the older lads of course, their ones are developed now, they can do longer than you, but you'll be able to do it in time. So, it's always a kind of a positive exercise. But yeah, I do I would. I really want them to know that because I would like them, then in time to come to me and saying, 'listen, I don't think you're able to get up to those notes anymore.' The only fear I always have this is maybe a wrong fear, but I don't want a big cascade of them all comes 'oh, I can't, because I need fellas in the tenor one', and if they all abandon ship, and I'm left with two or three, it's very, very difficult! So, I don't want them all to be doing that, but at the same time I do need them to have that control.

Brian: And, I suppose, playing the keyboard along with them and showing them the actual pitches, probably backs up your argument that they should be in specific parts as

well. Doesn't it like if they say they want to move for various different reasons, maybe their friends have moved line or whatever, that you can always bring it back to the piano that this is where.

Andrew: Oh, yeah, yeah. And then they'll know the top notes in that on that thing is what is what tenor one are singing, and they'll equally know when they can't get down to the lower ones. That's what the bases are singing. Then they'll know if they're in the middle, whether they'd lean more towards the baritone or towards the bass and their lads for every year, in every part like I have, I have certainly a second year, I think, in the bass, so they'll you know they know that. And I say, the one or two lads who wouldn't be wonderful pitchers, I don't make a big deal out of that. I almost nearly don't want to hear them. I certainly don't want to embarrass them. I you know, so I won't say 'right Brian, sing me that again.' 'Oh, I thought so that was the wrong note.' Now, last year I did when we're coming to your competitions, a former student of mine, who is back here in a PME. Last year, and he would help me. So, the odd time when we'd have we'd tune a chord, and you know, and he might stand behind the lad, and he might just do this to me, you know. So, in a gentle sort of a way, I kind of knew. And then what we would do is we'd sort of say, Okay, [named child], maybe listen a little bit more. There, just you're all not so loud. And yeah, mainly it'd be that. So the main thing is. you know, I think I would have failed, if I damaged their confidence, and themselves.

Brian: Yeah. So, the next thing is, how do you approach retention of young male singers in the choir?

Andrew: Yeah, well, that's a really good question, and it disappoints me always big time, you know, when fellas drop out and they do drop out. I mean they drop out of my choirs as well. I think one of the biggest things is well, I know is my own presence around the choir as much as I can over the years. I always sort of felt that if I wasn't there, that the kids kind of may have thought, well, if he doesn't care, why should I not care? So if I'm not at a rehearsal, I would really want to be at a rehearsal. I'm also one of those teachers who lived in the delusion, particularly in my latter years, that if I wasn't in class that the kids actually missed me. You know, and I know that that was a delusion that I allowed myself. They were probably clapping their hands and say, Andrew, is gone again today,

although I do remember a couple of times when I'd be away and when I'd come back, and even now, with the choir they'd be, they'd say to me, 'where are you going?' And when you be back and stuff', you know. So, I think my presence does mean something to them. But I would always want to be there. Because I kind of feel I have to lead from, for by good example. And if I'm you know, if I'm regularly missing, it's you know, it's just a really bad example. So I actually, even though I'm in a different job, I'm sure this cost our province thousands of euros. But I come back from whatever I'm doing. I and I plan a whole lot of things around [named day], which is when our rehearsal is.

Brian: Yeah, and any other things about retention.

Andrew: Well, I think I think encouraging them. All the things I said to you earlier are the main ways in which to retain kids is, are they enjoying it? Do they like the music? Because I asked them. We have had one rehearsal this summer, and at the end of it I asked them, and some of them, without being, said, 'hey, we like the new repertoire. It's good. These are nice pieces'. So, like, you know that that's a key to keeping them and then are they enjoying the rehearsals, you know, are like, and you kind of. That's something you have to be able to feel. You know, if you feel that the rehearsals are really, you know, a drag you need to start doing something. I think the concerts would be a thing. School concerts, things like that the auto day off class competitions. They're, you know. They're great things getting them off of class the odd time. The kids I find in the choir, the teachers in our school would say, are probably some of the best kids in the school. For whatever reason, and that, you know, last year a rake and went on to do medicine and stuff that were also bright. So, they like the odd class, to miss it, but not too much, because they don't want to be missing school and stuff. So, it's kind of a mix and match. It's like with your family, you know. It's kind of things, you know, when you have to freshen things up a little bit, and you need an auld treat. And you know, stuff like that. And Brian, maybe a really important kind of thing, and maybe doesn't fit in here. But I actually and I was saying this to [a named colleague]. You know, we're chatting. The social value of choir for them can't be underestimated. Like the mates that they make, the friends that they make in that, and being with their mates and doing something with them, that's you know, that's fulfilling, that's positive. And that's confidence building in their lives. I think you can't underestimate it, and there are probably aspects of

life and social media and kids on their own up in rooms, and nobody with them, you know that are out there, that this thing it really counters it in a big way.

Brian: Absolutely couldn't agree more.

Andrew: So, you know. So, it's yeah like that. That is so important.

Brian: And the next thing I was going to ask you about is teaching young males vocal technique. How do you approach vocal technique with young adolescent boys?

Andrew: Well, I don't know that I'm that particularly good at that. I really just get them to try and use their voice in a way that they can sing the notes that are written for them as effectively as possible. So the gear change thing for me would be very, very important. I don't do enough stuff on breathing. We do a warmup every day. Probably I could do more on that. I do a humming warm up, because it brings on a very, very good tone, and they automatically, when I sit at the piano, we do, and they're used to that, do some vowels. I get them to try and project, but without shouting I get them to maybe do soft singing together and singing kind of in chords, and but I probably should do more. But I'm always, our rehearsal is forty minutes on a Wednesday, and like it's kind of gone you break in to do. Warm up your breaking sections to the back. They're gone. And that's why these couple of summer rehearsals, so good for breaking the back of repertoire and getting a couple of things started. Yeah,

Brian: Brilliant, brilliant, and in terms of teaching vocal anatomy. I know you talked about this briefly in a previous question. How do you teach vocal anatomy, and maybe anatomy of the body, and its importance to the changing voice?

Andrew: Well, I don't know that I really that I do so much. I mean I do. I tell them about their skull, for the higher notes, and not to sing in the throat to try and think here, think around the eyes for certain pitches, and higher up, you know, I've seen that diagram way back. The sopranos and tenors will sing the you know the opera people from back here, and then coming forward as the notes get lower, and I mean I suppose I would be saying tried to sing through here. I'd sometimes sing above the note and come down onto it

rather than pushing it up like this. I think, [named teacher] who had the one about 'hide your chin, so don't shove out your chin. Hide your chin', you know. I don't can't say I do these all the time, and one of the things and that has amazed me over the years is that. I'll just tell you this story without boring. I'll be as quick as I can, but foot and mouth is a terrible disease, and if it gets into animals to have to kill the entire herd. And it came on into Ireland in sheep a number of years ago, maybe twenty years ago, and it was on the Cooley Mountains, and they had to kill all the sheep at the time on the Cooley Mountains. And this man came on a sheep farmer, and he said, you know, in killing all those sheep, he said, you're killing sheep, memory that decades, possibly over a century. And it stuck with me, and I'm thinking sometimes when the lads sing, I'm thinking, how could they do that? Because I never did that with them, but I possibly did it with them years ago, and I think there's a choral memory that in some way don't ask me how they pass from one to another. In a way, maybe a sound or a way of singing. I'm not too sure how it happens, but sometimes they do things that I kind of feel. I never actually said that to them. I might have said it twenty years ago to a group, but I never said it to them. But it seems to have to be in the memory, and equally well, I'm sure. There, I this I have heard of people are. You know what we, a video of us, might have gone up, and people say I can't believe the dreadful vowels that these are singing so equally well. I suppose some of the really bad vows are passed on to maybe.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant. And the last thing in this section is the importance of mentorship and having vocal role models for adolescent boys?

Andrew: Mentors. I suppose the best I could say is that I do get I do get to come back fairly regularly, people who were members of the choir in the past, and who are now possibly doing that on a full-time basis. So, you'd be talking about people like. And maybe [named conductor] who has come and worked with the lads like. If we had a Christmas rehearsal and [named conductor] was back in [named area], I'd get him to come in and work with them [named conductor] and [named conductor] would come in. [Named conductor's [named relative], [named conductor] has come in and worked with the choir. [Named conductor], who's now conducting. I got [named conductor] to come back in and work with them, [named conductor] who used to teach in [named school] is currently working in [another area]. But when [named conductor] was around I would

regularly get [named conductor] to come down and work at the choir. So, I've always kind of believed in getting kind of good people to kind of come and work with them, because I always feel probably my biggest gift is to get them together, to get them to sing together, to get them, to be enjoy it. But there are kids even in the choir that probably know more about choir than I do, and who would be more fussy about things, and probably rightly so than I would be. But say, my main gift is that I enjoy it, and I can get them to enjoy it. And you know sometimes the finer points. I'll get other people to come and help them with them.

Brian: Okay, brilliant, brilliant, fantastic. And I might move on to the very last bit of the interview. Is that okay? We have to head off, so we'll move on to the last bit of the interview in this section. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing. So, to start with, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland?

Andrew: Yeah, I'm sometimes I'm delighted when I go to competitions, and when we see choirs increasingly mixed, voice choirs coming and participating in in competitions. And that's probably if I were to go back to when we started. That's different. Because, you know, the community school attended in the past to be largely either all girls, choirs, female or male. Not too many males, or a small few schools ever doing it, but mainly girls' choirs. Now you see increasingly mixed voice choirs, and sometimes with quite a decent cohort of men singing with the girls, which I think is great. In the beginning, maybe fifteen to twenty years ago you might have had the token, you know, three or four lads, and usually kind of little first-year lads that were brought in to try and kind of sing the male parts, and it I often felt that was kind of hard. That's changed. And now you get, you know, kind of fifth- and sixth-year boys you know, taking on those parts, and sometimes big numbers of them that we'd see in [named area]. So I think that's really good. I think the numbers of choirs singing is really good but specifically talking about boys. I probably would have to say I would be disappointed with the number of male, of male, of schools, of all male schools that that are doing, that have choirs in them. Because, you know, kids in [named area] are no different to kids in [named area], no different to kids in [named area], no different to kids in [named area], no different to kids

anywhere. And you know every singing is healthy and is good, and clearly, that's not getting across in schools. It's kind of not happening.

Brian: And can I, can I ask in your opinion, like what could be done to remedy that specific issue? Because a number of people have said it to me. It seems to be a common theme in Ireland, that there are not as many all-male boys' schools that have successful functioning choirs.

Andrew: Yeah, no, you're well, you're right, I suppose, thinking about it. I think, first like, if I if you ask me to give it the steps of it, I mean again, I'm a kind of a realist. So, before I'm a wonderful kind of theorist or anything like that, I think I'm a real realist, and I think you have to start with people. You know. There's no point in having fancy thoughts unless you've got people around. So I've said this to a couple of people. If it was me if I was sent to [named school] next September, said, right, Andrew, you're going to be teaching in school here on for next year so, and they have no choir there. It's all boys school and they'll be all out playing Hurling and football and basketball, and they certainly will not be going to you for choir. I can tell you that for nothing. So how would I start? I think the first thing I would do is because this is what I said. It kind of to you already. I think this is, you have to. You have to get where the emotions and the heart are. So, I think the first thing I would do is I get together? I would, I would get together a group on the basis that we get together, we prepare for a little Christmas card service or a Christmas concert. And the music that I pick for that. It wouldn't be the only music I would do. But I'd say, right, this is our aim. This is what we're going for, and we're going to have a band as well. So, there must be a guitar player in this school somewhere. There has to be somebody in the school that can play a bit of drum, and maybe a keyboard player, or whatever. So, I'd form a little band, and I'd pick things like [named song], or [named song], or songs like that, you know. And now and so this is Christmas popular songs. No parts, nothing, you know. Maybe 'Oh, Holy Night' Because I've realised now our lads love to belt that out. Songs that would be kind of popular, have a bit of beat would have a band that, and that makes it a lot more accessible from their point of view. Kind of makes it feel like it's cool. It's not necessarily any cooler, but it just has that visual optic that it looks like that. Probably do a couple of other things as well. If I could learn something from the charts that's out there and say, 'come on, we all know

this', and I get try and get the cards for the kids, and I'd say we're all going to belt this out. So we'll do this as part of our concert as well. So, I'd aim it at where they're at rather than anywhere else. I'd start with that, because if I have a singing group that are willing to sing, we're all willing to stand up at Christmas, and sing. First of all, I'd be able to guarantee them. Everybody who comes in to hear us at Christmas is going to enjoy not only the class off, but the fact that we're doing this, and they'll admire you guys for doing it. And I think then I would start trying to, you know, to maybe do a little bit of voice work. Could we sing, maybe in two parts? Could we go to a competition? Could we invite up the lads from [named school] here to come and sing for us someday and do something with this stuff like that. But I'd certainly start, I think, for me Christmas, because everybody at Christmas is a child, whether they like it or not. All of those kids in the school are children. All the staff with them are children as well, and everybody becomes a child at Christmas, and it's a real good time, you know, to get people on board if you can do a couple of things that but do it in a way that that's part that's modern, you know, and not say right well, we're going to start with Silent Night, and then the 'First Noell' you know. Look, you'd half get away with it. But no, I wouldn't be doing any of that. I'd be saying get a bit of beat into it. Get a bit of drum, get a bit of something.

Brian: Yeah, amazing. And so, to finish off. What are your final thoughts on youth choral music in Ireland, and how it relates to boys singing what's working and what's not working kind of related to the previous question. But it's kind of a closing comment on boys' participation in singing in Ireland at the moment.

Andrew: I suppose my feeling like, and this is really not answering your question at all. My feeling is that my feeling is that if I wasn't in the job that I'm in right. If I wasn't in the job done, I meant I probably, and I don't know what it. Would I succeed or not? But I'd probably be happy enough to go around. you know a couple of schools to see if I could be of any help in that in that area. That's one thing. And not that I'm the Messiah, or going to necessarily change it. But I have. I have some bit of experience, the other thing, maybe, if I had enough time, and if you if you said to me right, Andrew, this is going to be your project. Now go and do something about it. Probably one of the first things I would do is, I think, about resources and I think about what resources have we that we can offer to [named school] or to [named school], or to you know [named school], or wherever it might be that might just get them off the ground so that could be some

people like, maybe me, but it's not the only one. There are people out there like [named conductor], the lads that I would know lots of them. I mean, it's probably one of the greatest. You didn't ask me this. We're going to tell you, anyway, one of the greatest kind of prides of my life are the number of chord directors that have come from the stable. I think I might have said to you the last day, mostly, I think, down to, to mentorship. But they started here with me, and obviously they enjoyed singing. Now there are lots of those around there, and I'd be saying what resources are out. And to be honest with you, Brian. The other thing I've learned is, it makes much more sense for the male voice, and don't say this too quickly or too loudly to [named conductor] before she gets too annoyed. But it makes much more oral sense to the boys if I say right, lads, come on, we're going to sing, and I sing 'Dayo Dayo'. Oh, now, if [named conductor] comes in, they don't know. They orally, they have no idea where that pitch is, ninety percent of them. They don't know where that sound sits for them. They're already struggling with their voice, and even after doing that once they'll sit there looking, and it's all that's come on! Come on, come on! I need to hear you. Come on, let's try it again, and I'll roar it out, and they'll say, 'oh, no, I don't want that now. No, I want to Dayo', and I shouted, and then I said, 'Come on, it's all up here', and they can link into it then and do it. But so that's why I'm thinking that the starting point is better with male voices and not kind of coming in saying, 'okay, well, I'm going to teach with this beautiful madrigal today'. And now they'll run out the door. They'll be gone like it has to be something that's that is male from their point of view, is that sexist that probably is terrible, but it has to make all sense to them, and maybe even you know, a male sound to them that it's kind of strong, you know. And okay, they can get with that. So, it's something like a Welsh male voice. Choir sound might make if it was the day that we're singing for the Rugby National Anthem.

Brian: Yeah, yeah.

Andrew: And you know, and I think, like they're probably very. They're probably not the most helpful comments, but I think they're real in terms of how do you? It has to make sense to them orally, and I think it needs also to make sense to them as men.

Brian: Brilliant. Thank you so much. So I'm going to finish. I'm going to finish the interview here now, if that's ok?

Appendix E
Interview Transcript – Brenda

Brian: Okay, so good afternoon, Brenda, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male adolescent voice change. And to begin with, I'd like to look, maybe briefly, at your own choral background and tell me, maybe, about your experiences growing up. Maybe going from, if you were singing in a children's choir, maybe what was the transition like from being in a children's choir to being in a kind of a youth choir of age, maybe to being an adult choir, and how your voice maybe developed over that time.

Brenda: Well, I didn't really have that much experience singing when I was a child, really. One year when I was in school, when I was ten, a man came to our school who was an organist and interested in choirs. And I relate everything I do to that one year he came. And I always want to learn the organ, and he also taught us in our school which is a very average convent school. Two movements of Britten's Missa Brevis, And I have no idea whether we sang it well or badly, but that one experience really changed me forever. I view that as really why I do what I do now.

Brian: Yeah.

Brenda: And then in my secondary school we had, not really very good. We had some choral stuff, and not really very much, and in the end, I used to take my friends and do choral pieces and things just to make sure something happens.

Brian: So even from an early age, you were, you were leading groups in school. Really yeah?

Brenda: Well, it was either that or nothing happened! So I suppose I did. Yeah, yeah.

Brian: That's interesting. You're not the first person I've interviewed that's done that actually, which is really interesting. So you learned very early and like, so did you take anything from that? You know, as a young person working with young people.

Brenda: Well, I realised the power of that, there wasn't boys, because I was only a convent school, a girls' school. But I realised the power of people singing together, and how enriching it was, and what a good experience it was, rather than just doing something on your own. And I think I was always drawn to that kind of quality in it.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant and in terms of your own professional background as a choral conductor. If you could maybe just talk about a little bit about your training? Maybe starting with like formal education that you would have had in music. Specifically, your formal training in music, and also any informal training that you've done over the years so that could be kind of books you've read courses, you've gone to, but through a lens of voice change. If you could maybe talk about on those courses. Was anything discussed about you know, boys changing voices etc?

Brenda: Well, if I'm honest very little, I, it's one of those, people have sort of general, slightly unfactual [*sic*] opinions about what could happen or not happen, and I suppose you pick up things along the way. But in everything I did I was an organ scholar in [named college]. I had professional choral scholars, so they were past changing voice. But they were still young singers. When I was in [named area] I was dealing with adult choirs, and I went to lots of [named college], either to observe or take part in courses, lots and lots of them, and occasionally boy's voice, changing voice was mentioned, but not really very much. I think it's something that's well slightly avoided. And it used to be a view that people should definitely stop singing when that happened. I don't think that is really necessarily the case, except maybe in some minor circumstances. But I think that the general feeling is very much moved towards keeping people singing. And so, in my experience, professional experience, that would definitely be something I would aim to do as well.

Brian: Brilliant. And is there any kind of more informal courses that you've done over the years like it could be with the ABCD, or, you know, with Sing Ireland, or anywhere in

America, or books you've read that have maybe educated you on the, on the changing voice.

Brenda: I read some documents in ACAD journals, and I've read some chapters in books and that kind of thing, but nothing that useful. I don't, I haven't found, anyway.

Brian: Okay. All good. And so that's kind of your background. Great. Okay. So in terms of professional practices, I'm going to move on to that part here. Now, would you be able to maybe go through some of the choirs that you've conducted in the past which include boys going through voice change. So maybe kind of name some of the choirs, and maybe the voicings that those choirs had, and maybe the amount of boys that would have been in them versus girls, and sorry just to say, and that could be choirs that are fully boys or it can be choirs that have some boys in them.

Brenda: Yeah. Well, my first real experience with that would have been [named choir], which was I'd say, about when I started about forty percent boys. Now, that was really a children's choir, so it was sort of a situation when your voice started going, there wasn't really a possibility particularly to transition to a tenor line or something. So I used to try and get people to keep singing, even if it was falsetto until at least the end of the year, and then they needed to move along, really, because we didn't have that at that time, there wasn't that a youth choir anything which there is now at least. And then my other big experience, obviously in the [named choir], which is, is boys and men. But looking at the boys, we always said, we have a policy that you either continue until the end of second year, or until your voice goes. And I have really come to the conclusion that, do you want me to answer what I found? Or just?

Brian: Well, actually, do you know what I think, maybe leave this for another section. I said, just stick with the voices of the cohort, because you'll have a chance to talk.

Brenda: Yeah, okay.

Brian: Later, yeah.

Brenda: So that's basically that. So, we have had boys whose voices have gone really quite young. And we've usually tried to the experience they have as those older choristers is very valuable. I've always tried to ensure that they get to the end of second year if they wish to, and we have a [junior choir] programme which often they might start till fourth or fifth year. But sometimes a boy wants to continue to go straight into that programme. And so you see, obviously, I'm keen to facilitate that if that they should wish, wish that.

Brian: And what about [named youth choir] as well? Like, in terms of young male singers in the choir?

Brenda: I've taken anybody who wishes to join, regardless of their vocal agility or vocal experience, you know maturity. And I found it to be a very good thing to get them singing then, because you are much more likely to keep them going. Yeah, they would be my main areas that I've dealt with that kind of changing voice situation.

Brian: Fantastic, great, and in terms of working with these choirs, which included young males, what would you consider your tasks and responsibilities to them? So a list of kind of tasks and responsibilities specifically for those boys who are changing registers.

Brenda: Yeah, well, I think the over overriding most important thing is to make sure, when a boy's voice was changing, that they can sing falsetto. Because if that's something they learn, then they always have it. If they don't learn it, then they never have it. And I think that's really important. And I think, certainly in the [named choir], where I wish to keep those boys as long as possible, they are probably 'falsetto-ing' at that later stage of their time as a chorister. But it's still a young sound, and it's still very beneficial in the choir, so I've always tried to make sure they're comfortable doing that through giving exercises to enable them to sing high, and to make sure they work on breath control, so that they have the support to manage the voice that is emerging.

Brian: Fantastic and other tasks and responsibilities that you have as a choir director towards these young men?

Brenda: Well, I think one thing I picked up from people, which I don't necessarily do, is just push them into alto. But I've discovered that really, it's both often, not always very individual, but the extremes of the voices go. So, the lower part of the voice is also not strong, so I think you need to be very careful that you do not, as a director, push them into a place in the choir where they're not comfortable singing, which isn't actually going to really help them ultimately. So I think that's important rather than going for the expedient solution, or I need an alto, or I need whatever to actually see what was best for that particular boy.

Brian: Fantastic, great, and for in terms of non-musical tasks and responsibilities, do any come to mind when working with young boys so more kind of developmental.

Brenda: Yeah. Well, I've had a situation where I would have had, like an extremely good boy treble who, when they would join like some [named choir], they suddenly find themselves the bottom of the pile. They've come from being a star to being 'oh, my God! I don't even know how to use my voice', and I think you need to really encourage somebody, those sort of people to understand their experience as a boy is very beneficial, even though their voices are changing, and to really support them, feeling confident in that changing time.

Brian: Yeah. A number of people have said this in the interviews where they go from being the star of the show nearly, to as you say, kind of like really discovering their new voices. Yeah. So, you think your task and responsibilities is to really work with them socially and emotionally as well as vocally?

Brenda: Yeah, you've got to really encourage them. I think.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic, great. And one last question in this section is kind of it's about so with any of these groups, so obviously you're a very well educated, successful choir conductor. But with any of these groups, when you, when you joined them or took them first, was there any gaps in your knowledge in this specific area where, when you joined, you were kind of like, 'oh, I really need to learn this specific thing or this specific thing about boys' voices'. Anything that comes to mind that with specific choirs?

Brenda: I think. I think the hardest part is dealing with a voice just changed and I think that's something that's you have to be very careful and very intuitive about, because you don't want to push a voice that's very inexperienced. And yet, if they're used to singing as a boy, a younger boy, varied repertoire, you want to make sure they feel they are musically challenged. And I suppose I found that I had to really kind of work out how best to do that. And that was an area that I felt I needed, I just hadn't particularly encountered it before, and I had to work on.

Brian: Fantastic. Any other kind of areas with different choirs where you felt you might have to have read up a little bit more on something?

Brenda: Well, I did used to try and read up about boys changing voices, but I found the information was so varied and not very helpful, that in the end I think I sort of I don't know, I suppose I stuck to my own what I personally experienced and tried to work out my way through that.

Brian: Yeah. So, using you're the experience that you have in different situations and applying it to a new situation kind of yeah?

Brenda: Yeah, I think that's been the most beneficial for me, anyway.

Brian: Fantastic, great. So, the next section is about challenges and successes when working with young adolescent boys. So, if you could describe some challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change, and these can be musical and non-musical challenges.

Brenda: Well, certainly for non-musical, I think. It becomes not very sort of cool if you like to say to be a boy singer. So probably around the time you become a teenager, it suddenly becomes you go to secondary school and becomes not so. I think boys very easy could drop off then. And I think you could have had a wonderful boy treble who suddenly thinks, 'oh, I'm not doing this anymore' and by this, unless you really try and inspire them to continue then, you can find they go off into school choirs or school rock bands,

and you then lose any chance of them coming back to what you know youth choir. I think that's the challenge. How you motivate and deal with that period where it's suddenly like, 'oh, I'm not being a singer in a choir, that's really not what I do, and I'm doing my sport, and I'm doing my all the other challenges that go outside'. So that's I think, one of the biggest challenges. Musically, I think it's that ability to, or that concern about getting him to sing repertoire that they're going to like, but in a way where you're not overextending the extremes of their voice. But I think that that can be managed, and I think, just without not allowing them to push. I think you can bring them along very quickly in the musical matters, anyway.

Brian: Yeah. Fantastic. Any other challenges that you can think of, I suppose, thinking of all the different age group choirs that you've, you know, supported in younger kids. [Named choir] would be kind of older teenagers?

Brenda: Yeah.

Brian: Any challenges with different age groups, you know that you can think of?

Brenda: Let me think. Well, I've funnily enough. I found that sometimes you get a very good boy, turns out to be not a very good adult singer or adult voice, but I've also found the opposite way. You had a very average boy chorister whose voice changes, and then they suddenly discover they have a very nice voice, and they really enjoy it. So, I found this. You can be slightly variable in in terms of what you might imagine could happen.

Brian: Yeah, so a kind of a slight inconsistency across, yeah, that's really interesting.

Brenda: Yeah, I definitely have found. And that's why I always think, even if a boy is average boy still worth investing a lot in them. Apart from, I think that would be worthwhile, anyway, I just then think you never know they could end up being an extremely good adult voice, or singer, and they then may come really into their own.

Brian: So that's kind of that's the challenge there is that it's not a hundred percent dead cert what's going to happen.

Brenda: No, and you can always think about, for example, the singer, Aled Jones. He had a most exceptional treble voice, and he ended up having an average adult voice. And how that must have been for him that disillusionment of 'oh, I'm bound to be a good singer' doesn't necessarily translate at all.

Brian: Because you have to find that new voice with training and stuff. Yeah, and in terms of success, moments that you've had within each of your choirs with the adolescent boys, and these can be kind of individual boys that have done certain things, or can be a group of boys, or any kind of a real achievement that you've had within your choirs?

Brenda: Well, I once had a, we don't always have a lot of people in our [named choir], and we can't really haven't got the room for it. But I once did have four really good boys, and I remember we were doing in the [named performance venue], and I decided to give them a moment a spot where they sang a couple of pieces, and it was really fantastic. I think most of them been head choristers, and suddenly they were that singing tenor/bass range, and it was really good. And then I think, also things. I've had [named number of] boys who've transitioned into being two extremely good altos, male altos. One's gone on to do that professionally, and that was really nice as well, because that would have also been not necessarily cool voice to have

Brian: So, you must have given them the support needed through that for them to have gone on? So that's kind of, I suppose, for you a big success that you obviously did a lot of things right there to keep them singing and develop their new voice.

Brenda: Well, hopefully, and other times I've had like a somebody who's joined like [named choir], who really, I didn't know where they were going to end up singing. It's like, 'oh, my God!' And then suddenly, this really fantastic second bass voice emerges, or something, and that's really satisfying, because you realise, okay, that's something they can use hopefully going forward in their lives.
Brian: Fantastic, and any other, maybe non-musical success moments that you've had kind of in the development of a boy, you know, over the years, or a group of boys, maybe non-musical?

Brenda: Well, I've had boys who, one would think, weren't really that interested. Who you would sort of think, well, they have really no interest, and yet they join the youth choir, they keep coming, and you gradually realise that however they may have presented, they have really a very deep commitment and are very loyal. And that's something I've definitely noticed. And probably that lack of being, that feeling of being not interested is that lack of sudden lack of confidence. And in actual fact, as they've grown into adolescent years, and so on, they've gained confidence, and they emerge as being very good singers and very loyal.

Brian: Yeah, excellent before we move on any other challenges or successes? Or would you like to move on?

Brenda: Unless you want me to say any more. I'm happy to move on.

Brian: Do any other ones come to mind?

Brenda: Let me just think for a second. No, if I think of something I'll mention it later.

Brian: Of course, brilliant, and the next section is key qualities of effective conductors working with young adolescent males. So, in the next section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers. And to start with what, in your view are the traits or skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change?

Brenda: Yeah, I, think you, yeah.

Brian: Traits would be would be kind of like how you deal with them. And skills are actually specific things you need to know.
Brenda: Yeah, I think you must always put the boy first rather than what you perceive to be the needs in the choir at that moment. I think you must. Always. You have to have the ability to listen. If you listen, you can hear a sort of a sound that changes in a voice. You

can hear more breath coming into voice. You can also hear when there's an edge on the extremes in the ranges. So, I think the trait of being able to listen is really, really important. And then I think, skills that you need are, you've to be able to, sometimes a boy's voice can really kind of reduce to almost like a fifth or sixth in terms of what they're able to sing. You've to be able to work on that range and very gently extend the ranges on either end. I think that's quite a skilled thing, and I think usually boys, they don't know what they're doing, and if they don't work on breathing at that stage, that transition period takes much longer.

Brian: Yeah. And in terms of sorry. Go on.

Brenda: And I do think you must get them to sing falsetto. Essential

Brian: Okay, in terms of like the traits of a conductor. So, in terms of like more, how you are with the choir, you know, and how you work with a choir with young boys. What kind of traits are you looking for in terms of more how they deal with the group?

Brenda: Do you mean changing voice, or do you mean younger?

Brian: I think changing voices. A group which includes changing voices. That kind of age group.

Brenda: Yeah. Well, I think, boys, I think boys, much more than girls need to be flattered. You get very far by flattering a boy, in a way a girl would never fall for it, I don't think! And I think you have to, boys need a lot of change, a great deal of time. So, you've just got to keep bringing in different pieces different exercises, different questions to keep them very engaged. And then, I think, certainly, with [named choir]. We cover extraordinary amount of repertoire, and some of its Palestrina, Lassus. It's not exactly, boys are going to wake up think 'oh, great, I'm singing Palestrina today!'

Brian: Some of them will, I'm sure some of them do!

Brenda: I'm sure they do later, but they may not at that time. But maybe some of them do. But you have to, you almost have to bamboozle them into do this and the other. And then suddenly, you finish working on that thing, and they've hardly noticed they've done it. So, I think you have to sort of hoodwink them along a lot of the time. And with changing voices, I think you a boy can lose confidence, and I think you have to make sure they feel they have a role with the choir, especially if they've been a very good singer, even that in that changing period. They've got to be mentoring or working with librarian duties, or you know different ways in which they, the younger boys, can still look up to them if they, isn't from a vocal perspective any longer.

Brian: Okay, I know there'll be a section on mentoring where I'll ask you about that later as well views on that. And so, what advice would you have for a new or aspiring conductor in the field of changing voices? And I'm sure you've had, like, assistant conductors and people over the years. So, I'd be really interested to know, like, if you had, say, an assistant conductor or an aspiring conductor in this field, like, what would the three or four kinds of things you would say to them when working with boys of this age?

Brenda: Well, I would firstly say, never stop thinking they can do a lot. Never narrow your perspective in that regard. Secondly, I would say, but do choose repertoire that they will like, and that's manageable. And I think if they know they've mastered something well, it goes a very long way. If they're used to singing a lot of rich repertoire, I would make sure you choose a lot of close harmony stuff that a lot of parts that they're not just landing out into unison, or that kind of thing, because I think it'd be very boring. I would definitely do, suggest doing a lot of exercises, breath control for sure and just gentle exercise that extend range, but really make that a very, very strong feature and keep obviously developing musicianship skills in that time. So, there's a lot of interest brought to the way you work with the choir.

Brian: Fantastic. And again, so if this person was, was, you know, in front of your choir for a rehearsal. Is there any other kind of like tips you'd give them on how to work with the choir. More of a person, kind of you know.

Brenda: Yeah, I think how the conductor breathes and supports the sound in that way makes a very big difference, especially in changing voice time, because very likely they will become breathy and unsupported, and the more anything you can do in your gesture, in your personal own breathing and support makes a very big difference. It's mirrored so, not unconsciously, by the young singer, I think.

Brian: Yeah. And actually, while I think of this in terms of like seating plans and stuff like that, do you? Do you have any? When you have a few boys that are going through voice change or struggling to find a new voice. In terms of where they sit with the other singers, do you have any kind of things you do there?

Brenda: I think what I found is my youth choir, that they seem to naturally mix up with good singers, and that's probably good, because then you've got strong voices surrounding you, and you then feel supported, and you learn even again, subconsciously, you learn from those singers, or this is this is fine to sing this way, or this is how I'm going to sound.

Brian: Great. And as part of this question, I have a few kind of shorter questions. If that's okay? So how do you approach the following aspects of the job. So the first one is repertoire selection. And, like what in your view constitutes a good piece of repertoire for a choir that contains young, adolescent male voices? What kind of things are you looking for in a piece of music?

Brenda: Well from my own personal experience, [named choir], I'm dictated by the liturgies and seasons. So I, in a way I, the changing voice is a minority part of the choir.

Brian: Yeah. That's an external factor that you have to just deal with.

Brenda: I have to deal with. So, I've generally found, I tell them, to sing the parts of the repertoire that they can, if something is too high or too low, just too mime it. Yeah. And that's usually worked pretty well. My youth choir, I probably have been guilty of choosing too tricky repertoire at times, not necessarily for changing voice, but just for the

general age of the choir. But I again, I don't believe in particularly dumbing down repertoire at that time.

Brian: So, it's a hard balance there isn't it? In that if you go too easy on them, they won't be musically challenged enough kind of is that what you're thinking?

Brenda: They won't be challenged, and also they won't be, they don't explore the possibilities of their voice enough, because everything's too safe.

Brian: Okay.

Brenda: That was my feeling within reason, obviously! But Yeah.

Brian: And in terms of like types of repertoire, obviously, you want it to be really good music. But is there anything else in it like, say the words, or it could be like the feel of the piece, the beat of the piece, I'm thinking maybe [named choir] as well like that age group, if that's possible?

Brenda: Yeah, I think a variety of language is really good, because you get great dexterity in speech. I think there's lots of pieces now which have lots of you know other sounds brought in, you know, bird sounds other things that's really good as well, especially in changing voice, because you do have to falsetto and explore range, develop different sounds. Very, very, very beneficial, I think, and then use your lip drills and things really good. And I think if you do some sustained pieces, you've a real chance to work on breathing that rather than just sort of sterile exercises. You can work on it within the context of the same piece. I think that's quite, very beneficial at that time, for sure. Humming is very useful for making sure your chords are shutting, so incorporating that into repertoire learning, repertoire, or exercise is very beneficial. To stabilise voices.
Brian: Brilliant. Okay. So you. So you're looking for repertoire that might have hums and vvv kind of sounds .

Brenda: Different ways of phonating. Yeah.

Brian: Excellent, fantastic, and in terms of assigning appropriate voice parts in your choirs. How do you go about that? So do you do some sort of range check, do you? How often do you check in with them when they're going through voice change?

Brenda: Yeah.

Brian: Do you put them like in an alto part, or a tenor part?

Brenda: Yeah. Well with boys in [named choir], I start each year and I check their range. Then it becomes very clear if anybody's in difficulty in terms of there not a first soprano anymore, or whatever. And I listen to them, and I usually ask them which part of their voice the most comfortable in? Because they will have very strong feeling. I'm comfortable with this range or whatever. And I think I largely let things be led by them, unless I think they're wrong. If I know somebody. In youth choir again I check the voice, and I will say, I think you at the moment could sing first tenor range. But I think you probably are bass. So, if you'd like to start there, and I said, you will very quickly know this is too high, this is too low, and usually I let them decide where they're arriving at.

Brian: And just to ask a bit more about that. In terms of allowing them decide, do you think that's really beneficial in terms of more the psychological challenges of going through voice change, that it's there in control, kind of knowing their voice, as opposed to you telling them? Is there a difference there do you think?

Brenda: I think that they yes, they've lost control a bit, and I think that when they're coming at that time the, voice part they end up singing will probably not be the part they will ultimately sing. So, I think, to let them have a say in, unless they really can't sing the range obviously, to say, look I, where do you think you're most comfortable? Where are you landing at the moment? I think that's fair. I think in the youth choir, all the boys that have come through quite a tight regime of repertoire, and so on. So they have a sense of their own singing, I think, and so I think they would be quite adept at knowing. Actually, I can't get that range, or actually, I need to be a bit lower, or whatever. And I have some. I've had some people who've come into that who can quite literally sing anything second

bass or tenor, and that's obviously the one part will be their ultimate voice, but they've a great range and agility which is fantastic.

Brian: Great, and in terms of retention of young male singers in the choir. I suppose, like, you know, what are some of the problems that you faced? And how do you deal with those problems?

Brenda: Well, I think it is hard, I think, as I said it does, it's not becomes not popular. There's so many challenges. Secondary school with studying and then other, you know, sports and other activities. And it's I think it's a, it's a challenge. You have to keep things. You have to have enough on that it's interesting always, but if you have too much on, it's a turn off. So, it's a very fine line of trying to keep people. And no, I think it's a challenge. And yeah, and if you have, if you have a very ambitious singer and there's a lot of other people in the part who are lazy, it's hard because they want to, they think, why am I doing all this work? And somebody else is just showing up and nothing in between. So, I think it's quite hard.

Brian: And in terms of teaching. Well, I suppose I link these two questions together. The idea of like teaching young males, vocal technique, but also vocal anatomy, and maybe the use of the whole body in singing. How do you approach that with boys? And I'd be interested to know, especially because, you know you have a girls choir there as well, Is there subtle differences in how you teach vocal technique and vocal anatomy to the boys going through voice change, and maybe the girl's choir that you have that are a similar age?

Brenda: I think girls do, slightly differently. They definitely around the sort of puberty their voices get much more breathy. And it's not dissimilar to the boys but although it's slightly, and you, literally the breath control is essential for girls as well. I think that anatomy is important, because people have a very well, they can have a very two-dimensional view like a stick men kind of view, and I think it is important, then, to get your body behind what you're doing. And I suppose I could do more of that. I used to do a lot more of that sort of thing. I think it is important, because I think well, I think the

more you understand about support and about how your body creates support for your sound. the more you're able to access it.

Brian: Yeah. And is there any way differences in terms of how you teach vocal technique with them? Like in terms of using physical gestures, you know. Do you find the boys like to do things more physically than the girls? For example.

Brenda: Not particularly.

Brian: Join them vowels in certain ways, you know.

Brenda: Yeah, I think. Yeah, you can do physical things with boys. They're probably slightly shyer to try them out. I think girls will probably go along with what you're saying more easily. Boys, I think if you incorporate movements, in your warm-up so they're actually walking, or they're feeling length. And they're feeling space. I think that's very important. I mean, I boys, ultimately once their voices changed, don't have head voice. And I'm always very conscious to make sure that's clear. We do some work on head voice now, but for you that's falsetto, you don't actually have a head voice once you're tenor or bass, I try and make sure they understand the difference in that sort of thing, and they're keeping their larynx low. Do some stretching with the larynx to keep it low, and that kind of thing. So, I do, anyway. Yeah.

Brian: And the idea of how do you approach the idea of mentorship and having vocal role models in your choir? So, you know, when a new singer comes into [named choir] or [named choir], how do you approach, what do you see as the importance of having mentorships non-musical and musical reasons?

Brenda: Yeah. Well, I think in [named choir], it's literally essential, because you've got boys starting at eight. And you've got kids up to fourteen or so. And the advantage of the experience of the older boys is immeasurable, even if their voices started to change. Because they know the whole setup how they're to sit where the music goes. Best way of sitting to sing well, where they are in the new scores, and I think I value, I always assign a mentor to a young boy, and they usually become very good friends. They always

remember their mentor right through their lives. Really, I think if a mentor is good, it's invaluable. They bring the young boy on so quickly. And that's a role that I think a changing voice can very much have.

Brian: I know that you've had you've had some like male musical assistants over the years that are really good singers. Have you noticed that, like the boys look up to them, or what kind of things would they learn from them, you know.?

Brenda: Yeah, I think the boys very much look up to their mentor, their boy mentor, their older boy mentor very much. And of course, [named group of young singers] and the assistants. Yeah, it matters. If somebody's a very good. We had one very good person. He transitioned straight from being a boy into a [named group of young singers] into the boys really looked up to him. He was not that much older than they were. And he was exceptional in every way, role model in terms of singing in terms of behaviour in terms of attitude. He was really an exceptional person.

Brian: So having someone like that like that, they can see like you can't be what you can't see that kind of thing that like.

Brenda: Yes.

Brian: That they can see someone, that is all of these things non-musical and musical. That's it. That's obviously what you perceive to be a crucial part. Yeah?

Brenda: Yes, yeah. I think boys very much need the leader of the pack much more than girls. It's a real pack mentality. So, whoever the head chorister is, or the people in senior roles, the boys fall in behind them in a way that girls are much, much more even situation.

Brian: Brilliant, really interesting, and so anything else on any of those things, or would I move on?

Brenda: No, I think that's yeah. Let's move on.

Brian: And when I move on to the final part of the interview in this section, I would like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing, going. So, to start with, like, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland.? And this is, you know, a really broad question not really related to your choirs, but kind of broadly from primary to secondary schools. Obviously, you've seen, I know you adjudicated a lot, you've done workshops a lot. So you really know the scene in Ireland, I think more than most.

Brenda: Yeah, I think there's been quite a change over the years. I'm just thinking about. My husband was in [named school] and he was not sporty, and there was no choir then. And then they had people like [named teacher], and so people like that, and choirs became viewed as an equally valuable team activity. And I think that's a very good development. I think schools are totally enriched if they are able to view any team activity, whether it's sport, or music, or drama, or whatever, as being valuable to the development of the boy. And it's slightly determined by the teacher, obviously, and by the sort of qualities in that school. But I think there's a lot of good developments, and I think lots of those school competitions and that kind of thing they're really, whether you win or you don't win, you're getting to hear other choirs. You're getting to join together. I think they're very, very beneficial. And there's quite a lot of that in Ireland, I think. Well, there's quite a lot of opportunity, but whether every school does involve themselves is different. But if you wish to, there's quite a lot of opportunity.

Brian: So you're actually really positive about it, about the music in Ireland.

Brenda: I'm not positive about the primary age.

Brian: Okay.
Brenda: In my opinion, that is the most crucial time. If you don't get kids at that age hooked in you've lost a lot of people.

Brian: And what kind of be done like if you could wave a wand, you know, maybe three things that could be improved with, say, the primary school transitioning into first year

and secondary school kind of age. What would you do? What do you think needs to happen to get more boy singing at that age?

Brenda: Yeah. Well, well, firstly, if you just look at primary schools, I mean it used to be you had to do music as part of your teacher training. Now it's music or art. So, you have a lot of people just choosing art. So, you have a lot of people who are extremely unconfident. So, they don't. They leave out music because it's just something they don't relate to. So, I think that's a huge issue in teacher training of primary level. There should be mandatory music. Like in Japan, all primary schools have a piano in a classroom. I mean, that's an extraordinary difference. I think if you haven't had music in primary school the chances of a boy then going into choirs and orchestras, or whatever in second school, is very much diminished. I mean, it can happen if you have a very. I think if you if there's a great sense of the school wanting big ensembles, you can obviously get people to join, but it's a huge disadvantage if you haven't done it when you're younger it's enormous. I think the primary is where the change needs to really happen.

Brian: Any other, if you could, again, if you could wave a magic wand, any other kind of changes that you would see would happen nationally?

Brenda: But I know that in America they have those regional ACDA or those regional choirs, and I think that would be really good if you had weeks for Dublin or weeks for [named area], and then then a national week for school system.

Brian: Explain that. So that's where a number of choirs come together?

Brenda: You audition like your school in your area or your areas? An area would audition singers would audition to take part in the regional week. I forget the actual name they're called in America. But I think that's really good, because then you get really interested people taking part. And then it's something people in schools aspire to be in. 'oh, I'd love to take part in that', or I'd love to.

Brian: Bigger music, events that that people can kind of take part in, something really interesting.

Brenda: Like a week-long. Interesting repertoire. I think that kind of thing, then filters quite important thing of school can be proud of. You've got five kids have been able to do this this year, or we've got ten or whatever. I think that's encouraging people. And you know it's like those Duke of Edinburgh awards whatever they're called, or Duke of whatever it's something you can put down your CV, an achievement you've had in secondary school age.

Brian: And that's interesting. What you just said there about maybe schools, maybe celebrating musical successes a little bit more actually. And it's kind of like leading into what you said about mentorship, that that that when good things are shared, you know, by people that have done it already, then other people might want to do that in the future. You know.

Brenda: Yeah, I think if you can celebrate any artistic achievement, however big or small, I think it's so beneficial because it's so enriching for the person I mean. People will stop being good at sports when they're in their thirties, forties, maybe, but you can actually go on singing into your eighties and nineties in a choir, and it's something that I think it should be supported. There's a huge change about the mental benefits of singing choirs that's become very new in the last, say ten to fifteen years, the benefits of it, and of course, benefits to adolescents as well when they're you know they're huge, changing moods, huge, changing hormones, that there is something which is an emotional thing, and you don't need to. You, you don't need anything except yourself and your emotions, and you can communicate with people in a in a very nice way. I think it's and you do things together. I think it's very powerful.

Brian: Great and any other closing remarks about the participation of boys in choral music in Ireland before we finish up.

Brenda: Well, I'll just go back to the, that leader of the pack mentality of boys, and I think if that could be fostered in young men, young adolescents. And you can keep that sense. It's really important, I just recently did something with a group of boys from [named country], who were like, say, fifteen years old and it was such a proud sense of

them together, the togetherness, and that we are a team, and we are. And they were slightly shouty choir, but in a way it didn't really matter. They felt they were really they're really bonding. And they were really going for it. And I thought myself, this is really good, but keeping them singing, just keep them singing.

Brenda: Okay.

Brian: And you can work on vocal technique. Maybe later.

Brenda: Later, and just keep them singing. Keep them feeling that they're part of something important. They're doing something important, and they're valued.

Brian: Fantastic. Will we finish up there Brenda?.

Brenda: Yeah, hopefully, it's okay.

Brian: Fantastic. No, thank you so much for doing that today. That's going to be a really excellent part of my research.

Brenda: Good.

Appendix F
Interview Transcript – Colin

Brian: Okay, great. So I'll start now. So good afternoon, Colin, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male adolescent voice change. So, to start with, I was wondering if I could hear a bit about your own choral experience as a singer, and your own experience of voice change, if you remember what it was like to go through voice change yourself.

Colin: Yeah well, I had, I suppose, for me I was lucky, I started at an early age singing. It started kind of in primary school. One of the teachers there recognised I had a voice, threw me into a [named music competition], and I was there, and one of the parents from the [named choir], said he should be, to my parents he should be in a choir. And my dad kind of was interested in the idea of what she spoke about, in terms of the [named choir]. So, while we were, well my [named relation] actually, he went first, [named person]. He's a singer as well. [Information given about this person), and so, and he's also he has pursued a different route, but he's an opera singer now in [named area] as well. So there's always been that kind of music in the family. Yeah. So, the [named choir], started there as a as a young boy soprano, age nine and eight, nine, ten around then. And then there was a good programme in the choir in terms of the they had the [named music institution], where you worked through medals. And so, you had to wear a medal at a certain level of training, and it was kind of, I suppose, an indoctrination into just this whole idea of choral music and music itself. So, when it came to, and plus, it was an all-male choir, so there were no girls was just so that was naturally the environment that I was kind of thrown into in the beginning. So then, as I went through that I became one of the stronger singers, and I worked up to being head chorister. So, I was at the age of kind of coming, just before my voice broke. I was the head chorister, went through all the leaderships, and then that's when I did a huge amount of solo work with like [named ensemble]. And you know, Pie Jesu's at any of the requiems that were going around the country, even in [named college], even before I went to [named college] to study. So, I had it. That's where that's really in terms of the idea of being a young singer, and then the voice going through transition, really resonates with me, and when you got in touch I was like, I like

that, do you know? So then, I went on, as I was doing that, I also studied in [named college], which is now the [named college], but the college music then. Then I did singing lessons and piano lessons. So, I did all my grades all through up to college in piano, and then singing. Funny enough the singing lessons didn't last too long, because I didn't find them as interesting as the choir. And the teacher, although he was great and it was a group class. He, I just didn't get enough out of the group class. It wasn't maybe managed right in terms of the time, and what we were doing material repertoire, whatever it was for me back then. And it just didn't do it for me. So I just did not like singing lessons, which was really interesting. So, I gave them up and on well until I went to college, do you know? So, and then I ended up going to [named college] and studied. Well, actually I can, I'll get back to the whole idea of the transitioning voice and all that. But back then it was like, 'okay, his voice is gone. He's no use'. Pretty much that's how I felt, I suppose, which you might find interesting as we go on. And so, I was given a scholarship to study [named instrument] in the [named college]. So, I did [an instrument] with [named teacher], who was in the [named ensemble], up to Grade Four. Didn't really like it. All I wanted to do was sing. I was the junior organ scholar in [named church], that didn't last very long. I was studying with [named teacher] actually, and all I wanted to do was sing. So, I remember back then the most important thing for me at the age of thirteen to fourteen was to develop this way technically, of being able to sound like a man. So, technique wise, I've discovered a way to get back into the men, and very quickly, because of sight reading skills, musicianship skills and all that, I was thrown like straight back into the men, to the tenors. So anyway, we can get back to that. And so, but just in terms of the training, then, I ended up going to [named college], did a BA. Then I did a master's in vocal technique, and when I was there, our vocal performance, and while I was there, I also my real love was discovered, which was conducting the [named ensemble]. So that was absolutely mind blowing for me when I was offered it. I initially went 'oh, I don't know. I don't know. Like these are all my friends I don't know', and I really, I almost said no. And then I went back, and I said, 'look, yes'. and it just took off from there. And then I went on to the master's and finished that, and then I went to [named area], and I studied further vocal training there with one of the professors in the [named college]. And while I was there, I realised, do you know, I've been doing this all my life, I think I'm going to change. I want to do something completely different. And my now wife was with me then, and so at the time the kind of [named time period] was taken over in Ireland, and

I decided, you know, we're going to go home, and I'm going to do [named course]. I decided [named area], because I knew, once I go home, I was going to get all those gigs. Actually, I was a founder member of [named choir] which started at the time. [Named conductor] was constantly on 'Colin can you come, Colin can you come'? So, I was like, I wanted to get out of [named area], and so went to [named area], did my [named degree]. It was like [named degree] for anyone who had a, who had a [named degree]. Because they all the companies, were desperate to find people. So, I took to [named profession], loved the idea of [named profession], became a [named profession] and went. And nobody in [named area] knew I could sing. It was fantastic, a little break, and discovered a different part of me, which was [named profession]. So, I went and did that for [named amount of years], with [named company] up in [named area] and kind of got settled in life in terms of houses and all that kind of stuff, and then and eventually decided, that's really what I wasn't, didn't want to do. And my wife who then, after [named amount of years], we were married just like yourself and Lynsey, and decided that we wanted to go back to music, and we were going to, because were living in [named area] at the time, and there's absolutely nothing here in terms of maybe, the kind of music education that I had had growing up, just was not here in the midlands at all. Everything was just you know, drama places and stuff so, and any kind of formal music. Lessons were taking places and houses and things like that. So, we kind of set out on the way to maybe, not knowing it at the time, but to, you know, develop, just a music school, and develop like. Really, it was difficult in the beginning, in terms of having to educate, maybe around [named area] because it was all completely new. What are these languages? What is this Latin stuff? What is this like? So, it was very difficult, but very quickly it kind of kind of grew. Do you know? And am I missing anything there? Just I know I'm rambling already?

Brian: No, no, not at all. It's great to hear.

Colin: But yeah. I think that's in terms of my actual kind of experience going through. Then, obviously, I started the chamber choir, the [named choir] then once I started training voices. So, I was the main singing teacher, vocal. And I absolutely love that because I'd gone through a huge amount with my own voice and I discovered then that really take teaching a vocal training is what I wanted to do, because I had gone through so much going back to what I said about that idea of creating my own technique. And you

know, singing lessons weren't good enough for me back then. So now I did have singing. I had a good few singing teachers in Ireland, but they didn't really do it for me technically. I want to know technically exactly. I didn't want to hear 'oh, lovely, you're wonderful! My best tenor! My, this and that!'. I just wanted to know, how do I do this properly, do you know? And it wasn't until I went to [named area] that you know, and at that stage I even had my master's, and I went to [named area], and it was like, no, no, everything's wrong, everything's wrong.

Brian: Some of these themes will come up later in the interview, so I'd really love to hear your thoughts on the vocal technique end of things, you know.

Colin: Yeah

Brian: I might move on to the next question, if that's okay. This question is about your if you could describe your professional background in choral conducting. So perhaps talk about some of the formal education that you'd specifically related to voice change. And I'm wondering if any of these courses, when you did them told you anything about adolescent changing voices? And then, after that, perhaps some non-formal things that you've done that could be literature that you've read, courses that you've done that specifically to adolescent voice change, or perhaps that didn't relate to adolescent voice change. So, the formal side of education perhaps first, and then more informal.

Colin: Yeah. I suppose, like, in terms of the idea of my, as like in terms of formal education, would really come from maybe when I started singing lessons and a formal, the idea of taking lessons. And as I said, that just didn't do it for me, because now the guys that were in the class, they were from also [named church], and, like there was other it was, It was all of the good singers were kind of put into this class on a Saturday morning, but it just didn't do it for me, and I think that, but it could have been where I was at the time in terms of my own maybe successes, I think when I was in the . Because I was the man in the choir like. 'Colin was the man like', you know, amongst the my peers, and I was doing a lot of solo work and things like that. And I was working through the system fast and all of that kind of stuff. So, I didn't really get too much out of the idea

of technique, do you know? I suppose maybe that could be down to the teacher. I think it's always down to the teacher.

Brian: Specifically with adolescent, changing voices like, so when you did your master's in vocal, you did your other I think it was master's over in [named area], or whatever that was so. Was there any element of those courses that talked about the adolescent, changing voice?

Colin: Not specifically to be honest, not when, the real problem there was that there was nothing to support the adolescent, changing voice, and I think you might find that interesting because I had been this person as a young boy in the choir and I had learned all of these, I mean, we were singing repertoire from, you know different Byrd masses, Palestrina, all this early, crazy music. Sight, reading it on the day you know. Go in on a Wednesday or Friday. The lads, men will come in on a Friday, and I suppose that was always a good, a good thing was that you could see there was a draw because the men were there. It's like, 'oh, I could maybe be one of those one day', but like going back to the technique, not really like when it came to the choir itself, there was a couple of key, maybe figures in the choir that I would look to, would have looked up to as male singers. So, like [named teacher], he was, would have been in the choir, and he maybe gave me some lessons as well. So, they were studying in the college music, but they didn't really do for me, either, in terms of what was happening with my voice, and how I could sing again, sing properly, and technique and all of that. So, it wasn't until then that I actually went to college, and I went to I had a teacher there in college, [named teacher] and again, she was lovely. She was very good, very encouraging, but really, technically couldn't, didn't quite explain what it was all about.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: I knew what was going. I knew I was. I knew I was bluffing, and I wanted to find out how I could have to do it properly. Do you know.

Brian: I'm just wondering, is there any more informal things that you've done over the years that have related to the adolescent, changing voice? So, any kind of courses, online courses, literature you've read, anything?

Colin: No, there, really there really isn't. There really isn't Brian. Do you know, I like what I work with, I work with these young boys now, and I understand what they're going through, and I nurture them, I mind them and I look after them. And the most important thing for me is that they keep singing, you know. Back then I was told, stop singing, but really looking back now, I suppose, the conductor had had a job at hand, and I can't have this young guy squawking. And you know, so there's it's really like so let's put him away for a few years until he comes back and then can contribute again. And that's how I was treated, and I remember feeling really very hurt and deflated by all of that. And as a singer it was like my singing career had ended. And as a result like and nobody, I think like, nobody has empathy for kids that age. They're just kids, you know. Yeah, just go away. Go and play the [named instrument]! You know. So, it really wasn't until I really started learning about the voice and just through my own teaching, and also in [named area], the teachers I had in [named area], like, wow, they're just technicians over there.

Brian: And it's brilliant that, like, obviously, you had that experience as a kid. But now you've all this knowledge, this fantastic knowledge of the voice, and you're able to give that to your singers.

Colin: Well, that's really like the, actually knowing having gone through it and having that actual life experience, It's like coming back and being able to say, 'oh, no', okay, you know, the different ways that you can keep singing, and that's saying to me in terms of repertoire in terms of whatever you pick and stuff like that, you know.

Brian: We'll talk about a lot of those things coming up soon, but I might move on if that's okay to the next section which is professional practices, and I suppose to start with, if you could talk about maybe choirs that you've conducted past and present that contain adolescent boys with changing voices? Just name a few of the choirs, just so I can get an idea of the different types of choirs, voicings all that kind of stuff.

Colin: Well, I suppose, in terms, ones that I've conducted are really choirs, that I've really created myself.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: And that would be well, the first one would be the [named choir]. So that would have started, that would be my first choir that I started with and then I start.

Brian: Would they have had sorry, just sorry, to interrupt. Would they have had.

Colin: Yeah. At the very beginning I would have been feeding singers. It was, the whole idea is to set up a choir that could tackle decent repertoire. So, I set up the chamber choir in the very at the very beginning, and back in [named years], when we, when we were getting stuff going in the [area in Ireland]. And any singer that really was ready to sing in terms of like from the age of maybe fifteen to sixteen, up they were thrown in there once their voice kind of started to come back. And I was also working, and I still am working in the school downtown, secondary school, and I train voices there. So, I would bring these younger voices, male voices that were coming up from, maybe TY on, and I'd put them into the chamber choir. They'd come over and absolutely loved it. So that's where it all that my first working with my first real teaching and training was is through working in lessons, one-to-one lessons with these young male voices. And then having an outlet for them creating outlets for them to see like what they're doing in lessons. Actually, it's valid. And there's other people doing this as well. Oh, okay, 'whoa, this is amazing'. Yeah.

Brian: And just in terms. I just want to stick to the question because a lot of this stuff is going to come up later. Any other choirs that you've conducted that contain adolescent voices?

Colin: Yeah, so my main, my main choir that I would conduct would be, would be [named choir], and that's an that's an extension of what I started back at the same time as the chamber choir a couple of years after it started children's choir. So, it's for all of the schools around. So, you'd have, and that was mainly because a lot of people would have

been looking for lessons and wanted to sing and stuff. So, I started a little choir and that quickly gathered legs, and so it's for boys and girls. But the boys would mainly get through to maybe sixth class, and they'd be starting to drop. And then in more recent times, I've set up the [named choir], because those kids would go into the school, and I'd be teaching them in the school, in lessons, and that's where they, you kind of nurture them through their technique and all that. But in in terms of the youth choir, it's like once they're once their voice has settled in any way, let them into that environment and let them sing.

Brian: And one thing I find really interesting about what you have there is, there seems to be a very good ecosystem where it's not just this, this choir, that rehearses on a certain day.

Colin: Yeah.

Brian: But actually, you're in the schools. And like the fact that, like you're giving singing lessons to these students, sounds to me like the most incredible support, for their development.

Colin: Yeah, it's, and you know, Brian, it all, it all just happened very naturally. It was never set out or planned, or anything like that. I set up this, the what we had, the [named choir], and then I set up the children's choir, and the parents just loved it. And then the school, the secondary school, came to me and said, like, we're looking for a singing, teacher, because they all want to do singing lessons. Are you free? I said, Yeah, okay, I'm free whenever and these are my, and I've been in there, I've been there since, like I've been there for like [named amount of time] years now, just doing that in the mornings, and it's really good because I can train them, and then they go into the choir, and they also feed into the school choirs, you know, and then but they're there. You can bring these, especially young boys. You can bring them along, and they can see that there's a system there. They get into the youth choir, and that's when it all starts for them. Do you know.

Brian: Fantastic. So just before I move on, there's no other choirs you've ever conducted that have adolescent boys in them? Is that's kind of it, is it?

Colin: Yeah, but like the they, the that's yeah. Like anything I've done is here in [named area], and I've created it myself out of love, necessity. Yeah, let's do. Let's see if it happens. Same with the same with now, I'm, these adolescent boys especially have decided that they want a [named choir]. So, I'm starting a new choir, for after the youth choir.

Brian: Oh! Fantastic!

Colin: I don't know how that, but it's going to happen so. And this has come from because a lot of the, a lot of the singers, especially the male singers, have gone on to sing in like the, the [named area] choirs and [named choir]. There's two or three that, as in that now, and they just got into the university system, and now, they want to come back to [named choir]. So, I'm like, Okay.

Brian: Brilliant! Best of luck with that. That sounds really exciting.

Colin: Yeah! I'll see. I'll see if it happens. But like, there's a few people interested. And yeah, yeah.

Brian: And the next thing I'm going to ask you, and I suppose because I think the choirs that you work with, which have adolescents are all ones that you set up. So, this question may not really apply specifically to you, but.

Colin: Yeah.

Brian: The idea of gaps in your knowledge that you had when you started with these choirs specifically about the adolescent, changing voice. So when you started these choirs, I wonder like if you could talk about any gaps in knowledge that you kind of found specifically about adolescent, changing voice, where you were kind of like, 'oh, I

need to go and learn something about this, or I need to try something out here, or I need to do something'.

Colin: Yeah. You see, I'm kind of lucky in that my own experience was how I was, how I was maybe treated back then and then become turning to becoming an actual singing teacher. Which is what I do. I train voices. And then when these boys come along, and the you know, the empathy, everything you just relate to them. Do you know? Plus, the knowledge of the voice. I mean, I think that's the most important thing is really understanding the changing voice. And also, the idea of it's all about technique. It's really all about technique, understanding, the changing voice, and the idea of working with younger male voices. And then, when they start to change, knowing that there's going to be a different instrument. So, working with the younger voices, the different registers, their head voice, just like a female voice. You know, the idea of this head voice, the chest, the all the different registers, the breaks in between the registers.

Brian: And I think we'll get onto that in in a few questions if that is ok?

Colin: Just keep going just keep. Yeah, yeah.

Brian: Yeah, the next thing I'm going to ask you about are challenges and successes that you've encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change. So perhaps just start with you know, a couple of challenges that you found, and they can be music or non-music. Yeah, different challenges that you've encountered.

Colin: I suppose, probably, and maybe not even in a flippant way. But really, it's like, maybe probably football. That's a really hard one. In terms of, and I mean that in I mean that in a bigger kind of a social kind of aspect. So what we've done here in [named area] is, has taken a long time to develop like a system where people see. Oh, choirs, choirs, I mean here in the [named area], like choirs, are just everywhere, all of a sudden, you know. But it's taken a long time for that to become something, but really in terms of challenges, it's really there was nothing to see like. There's nothing to look up to. It wasn't there. And of course, this being [named area], if you like. It's Gaa, it's in deep in the community, it's deep. It's in the genetics, but also, it's in the parents, so support, so

socially, that was difficult. And I suppose, being in a choir for a boy, it's not something you can force on someone they have to go. What is that and find it, do you know? So, it has to be there for them to find it. But in terms of, I suppose, really to like in the development of the choirs was that the parents started to see, 'Jesus, he loves this singing, he loves this. What is this?' What is it you know? And then, when they do concerts and they do. They're like the parents are like, 'Whoa! What was that?' You know? So, it's a different level of, and just the joy and the love that they get from actually doing it. So that was, they were the initial, the initial challenges, especially like somewhere here in [named area], you know. But in terms of real maybe challenges, I suppose, is probably, I just wrote down a couple of things, I suppose maybe just managing the vocal change You know, working through from a boy's voice, and then, true to like the eleven to twelve, thirteen to fourteen, they're all going to be at different levels. They're all going to be at different stages in their development and their vocal development. And how do you manage that? Do you know? So that would again, we could probably get back onto that again in terms of repertoire and stuff like that. But that would have been the main challenge, really and then, and just retaining engagement during those teenage years, and that will be like the idea of what I could do, that would probably be a bit more fun and a bit more challenging for them than a football match. So how do I challenge socially that this is really a cool thing to do, and it's fun, and it's engaging, and do you know what like, there's girls in there as well as all of those things. And for me, that was kind of new as well, because I'm from an all-cathedral sacred music, male choir through to. And all of this is new that I'm creating so, and I'm discovering as I go. Do you know. And then, I suppose, the idea of communicating with the parents about their vocal changes. And I would do a lot of that in terms of lessons, because I'd be teaching these boys as well. Do you know? So for them to understand that like, okay, he's his voice is breaking. It's not breaking and explaining how it changes and how he's going to feel and what they go through socially as well in terms of voice cracks and bumps and stuff like that.

Brian: It's very, it's very unique, Colin, I think. What you do. I haven't come across this, I don't think in Ireland before where the conductor is the singing teacher for a huge amount of the choir. Yeah, like a very unique

Colin: Nearly all of the choir. Yeah!

Brian: I've heard it with choirs that have competed at a university level, you know, from America and from Indonesia, where there is a full-time lecturer, you know, in a university, and gives them all lessons, but I've never heard it with a youth choir. It's a really interesting.

Colin: I think it's just Brian, I think it's just the circumstances that you know. I mean, we were living in [named area]. I mean I'm from [named area] originally, you know, I'm from [named area]. Went to the [named choir], studied in [named area], had all of those amazing things. Went and did [named course], came to [named area], wanted to get back to music, and this is to have the standard of what I had growing up, and maybe to be able to pass that on, because that's what I am, a teacher is to do what I did, but it was never. There was never like a business plan, or there was never a, it's just, it's a natural development. I suppose, that probably it comes from maybe the person that I am. Do you know?

Brian: Yeah, any other challenges before I move on to success?

Colin: I suppose, like there, I suppose, in terms of like just boys at that age, like, there's a lot of like, you do a lot of mentoring, but in a kind of a cool way, like, you know? It's not like, so that they can see and trust you, that like this. It's not like you can't force it down their throat, they, and there's different social aspects as well. Like some of them might be heavily involved in Rugby, GAA. Or whatever, and they're kind of getting bullied for being a singer, being in a choir and stuff like that, and you have to, just try and encourage them through that if they come to you, or whatever. And just look, don't mind that stuff, you know, like your friends are here in the choir, you know. And then and then having something for them to look forward to, a performance, the competition, or whatever for them to drive towards. That's probably, and to bring them on that journey. Do you know?

Brian: Brilliant, and any successes that you've had with adolescent, changing voices in your choirs over the years?

Colin: Let me see, like well, I suppose the main successes would be that like these kids have come from it not being here, for it to being in their lives for them, for being for it, to

being a big, huge part of their of their life, growing up in terms of going to university, still singing. You know, being, just loving acapella singing. Having all the skills, sight reading, getting them ready for the world of choral music, and that's something they'll have with them all their lives, I suppose that's probably. And now you know, they're coming back asking me to set up another choir for them. So, I suppose that's it's just everything just keeps coming back kind of full circle, and that's I suppose that's the main success, maybe for me. But I suppose, and because of that, I've maybe developed you know, like the guys are in the choir now, they're looking at like 'oh, my God! Remember, Jesus [named child] was amazing and like 'oh, [named children], remember them!?' And like now they're there, and now they're in like [named area] with [named choir] or whatever. So, it's just like, they can see, have role models that you know. It's about them.

Brian: And actually, just one question, because you have a unique situation. Is there any like individual boy that you've worked with in singing lessons that's gone through voice change, that you've had a kind of a real success moment with them, you know, in any way.

Colin: I love working with male voices because I really understand the male voice. I really understand technique. I really understand how to get them singing successfully. And there's always a point when they're really ready for that voice to plug in. And they're like, 'oh, my God, wow!' , technically, you know and like look.

Brian: Aha! Moment when you have them. It's just like seeing them find their new register in their voice.

Colin: Yes, yes, their new voice, you know, it might take a bit of time. And but you talk, you tell them 'look, listen! It's still settling'. 'Don't worry about this and that', you know. But let's we'll sing this, and whatever you know. And then, but I think probably, success moments would be them rediscovering their new instrument. And you know, it could be discovering that, like, they're going to be a tenor, their high notes, or they could be especially the basses. They're going to be a man like they're like down as an F sharp going like 'baahhh'.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: I want to be a man like, you know, and just seeing them turn into that that. And you know just that kind of stuff to just having them.

Brian: Fantastic answers. I might move on to the next section, which is a key.

Colin: And also just to say right about also, any anytime they've ever sound. Anyone who's ever heard them has pulled out the male voices and said, and the male voices, 'oh, my God, they're incredible, you know', and that's they're always. And I pick repertoire that will show off their voices, too. You know.

Brian: And that's something interesting, actually, that I might get to later. Actually, no, do you want to talk about? No, we'll get to that later, if that's okay, I think you might have something interesting to say there. So, the next thing is key qualities of effective conductors. In this section I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers? And to start with, what, in your view, are the traits and the skills that you believe essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change. So, I suppose, for me, like traits, are kind of you know, you know how you work with the choir. But skills are specific things that you know.

Colin: I think the number one, the number one thing, and I've written them down here is vocal technique, vocal knowledge, understanding, the changing male voice. Understanding where they're at, and how to develop that, how to help them and look out for them through that. Now for me, I don't need to outsource that. I do that in lessons, or even I will do it in the choir, you know, by talking to a full male section, but maybe concentrating on one person, and they know I'm giving them something they need that how to, you know. So, technique is absolutely for me the first one, and not just that not just that they understand the technique, but that you understand. As a conductor. You understand this and can give it to them. And can hear and see what they're doing wrong and mind and manage their voices throughout the transition. Do you know? So that's the first one. And then I think after that I think empathy and humour. So, you have to be fun,

you have to have the craic. There has to be so much fun, but you'd have empathy as well. Do you know, in terms of I just think that like for that age group, they can be broad, you know. Where are you going? I'm sorry I lost you.

Brian: Can you hear me?

Colin: I can hear you now. Yeah, sorry. I forgot had a touch screen thing, and I was just like wiping some dust off there. But I think there's a broad kind of an idea around teenage boys that they're up to no good, maybe, or they're not like, you know. So in terms of these kids that want to be singers, that you are mindful that, like, they're actually sensitive human beings, and they need your help. Do you know that you're there for them, vocally, technically, you know. And because I didn't have that, do you know? And then, I suppose, patience, I suppose, and adaptability like being able to like, if someone's having you know, issues with certain pieces of stuff that you can adapt certain ways to, you know, move them to this or that, or whatever, in a nice way, or, you know, just adaptability. And then I think, yeah, definitely just repertoire knowledge, knowing exactly what's on that page. And the most important thing there, is will, for the lads would be, will they like that?

Brian: Yeah, me to my next question. I've a list of kind of almost like quickfire questions, kind of like about working with adolescent boys, and the first one I have is repertoire selection. How do you approach? Say you have adolescent changing voices in your choir, how do you approach repertoire choice from that lens?

Colin: Well, I suppose the first thing is to know what I have in front of me, and also what's going to be available on a particular day when you're going to that particular competition or concert, if that low G is there, or whatever so just knowledge of the voices that are there. And then then really limiting your repertoire choices around that. So, in terms of what you have in front of you. And then the second thing would be musicianship, so I always challenge them. I love to challenge them. They want to be challenged. And I mean, that's what keeps them there. It's not me. It's the music. It's the music that keeps them there. So, it's they're always asking, you know, at the end of the

year, Colin, what are we doing next year? What do we do next year? You know what pieces, what pieces you know. Let's go and beat that [named choir]. Come on, let's go!

Brian: Yeah, but it's brilliant, isn't it that they are so excited about it and just so into it.

Colin: It's the repertoire.

Brian: You know it's, you would say then to well, well I'm `not putting words in your mouth, but not to underestimate them kind of. Is that what you're saying?

Colin: Oh, absolutely because I mean like they, it's the repertoire that will lead their choral musicianship, their choral skills. It's absolutely everything, you know. So, repertoire choice is absolutely intricate. So, if I come back next year and say, 'okay, we're going to do this, this, this and this, and we're going to do the same pieces as last year.' Forget it, you know. So, it's key. It's finding that balance. Finding the pieces that you know, having the knowledge of their abilities, their skills, that you'll get them to the performance just in time that they have been challenged enough, but can pull it off perfectly, you know. And of course that's the that's the drug for me a conductor. Do you know.

Brian: It's a biting point, isn't it? It's a real biting getting the right thing, you know.

Colin: I think that's why we take time off over the summer. Take a little bit of time, and then you start listening again. You're like down a rabbit hole, and down on.

Brian: Yeah, yeah, brilliant. And the next thing is assigning appropriate voice parts. So, if you have, you know a boy that's going through voice change ,how do you approach what part of the choir you put them in, or do you move them around as they change? Or what's your approach?

Colin: Yeah. So, for me, so unlike what I went through, when I was told to stop singing, you know, it's really that that's I keep coming back to that, because I remember I was famous back then in my mind, do you know? And that was taken away from me until this

new voice. But there was no one there in that transitioning period to help me there, do you know, to get me there. And of course, parents and sure they don't understand. They just say, 'well, look! That's what you have to do. Go and learn the [named musical instrument], and go and learn the [named musical instrument], and go and do that.' Yeah, but so for me, and just knowing the voice it's normally around sixth class that the voice starts to change. Now it could be first year, it could be second year. Sixth class, first year, second year. And that's the idea of having a children's choir, coming up to, maybe for primary school that they would have be able to get through until sixth class. And some of the boys might struggle towards the end of summer. They're trying to not sing down an octave and stuff, you know. And then that's when you start working with them, you know, even in sixth class. So you're like, 'okay, listen, your voice is changing. But actually, do you know what? It's not breaking? Everyone's going to say, oh, your break! Your voice is breaking and straight away in with and telling them it's not you're actually this. See this thing here, that's just going to grow.' 'Oh, so it's not changing'. Your chords are going to grow longer, just like the strings at the end of the piano are longer and the ones up here are shorter. Yours are there at the moment you're going to be there.' Do you know, things like that. And so, they're not scared about what's going to happen. They're not because it's there's so many other things in their in their life that's happening that singing. Yeah. You know, you need to pre kind of load them with the idea of the knowledge of what's about to happen, do you know? And then, luckily for them, if they want to continue, the youth choir is there, but that's never they decide to turn up, or they don't. And funny enough we always find they don't turn up for a year or two. Do you know.

Brian: And in terms of voicing in different parts, do you start them in one and move them?

Colin: I start them in tenor yeah. So, like I, I would like, I've been lucky up until now, I've always had SATB or SSAAT or even TTB, I go three parts of the lads. But generally, it's a bit sparse, I'd normally have maybe about seven lads if I'm, seven to ten, if I'm lucky, you know. So, and then you need one or two just really good singers that are normally there, good leaders and good readers, and all of that.

Brian: We'll get to that in more detail in the question about role models.

Colin: Yeah. But going back to the idea of voicing, they always come straight into the tenors. So that was that would be, the reason for that would be, that, they're not generally going come in and just start singing, because they know. It's that they come into an environment where there's like all of a sudden, they're to them, as kids, they're adults there, like, even though they're still kids, they're like old kids.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: And they get just used to the environment. And that's where they start to learn because they can hear like a guy beside them tenor who's maybe in TY, fifth year, and he's like whatever. So, they they're exposed to their new choral instrument, if you like, or what's going to happen, you know. And then eventually, I find they do, then they come for lessons. Eventually they look for lessons, if that's what they want and they that's when it starts. You know their actual, their new training. And then you just watch as their voice drops, and you talk to them all the way you say well, look you bring them. I always make sure to warm, you know. Everyone seems to warm up to the high C for the sopranos and stop. But I always make sure for the lads to warm down, you know, and they love going down there, you know, and then the girls see the lads going down there, and they're like kind of laughing sometimes. But that's their masculinity, if you like. They need that when they're singing.

Brian: Would you say that kind of when they start in the tenors at week one with tenors, is the priority kind of social and getting used to the environment over vocal? That's what you're saying?

Colin: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah, because they'll figure the vocal side because they they've either been singers before, or if they haven't been singers and just coming straight into the choir at that age, and they're trying to figure out what this is all about. You know, they're not trying to perfect us, but if they see someone, and I'm going 'you, like, come on like blah blah!' And if there's any sniff of engagement with them in the singing, you're like, 'well done, let's keep going', and you know. And so, it's just an encouraging

environment. But like to have the actual just to have the choir there for them to see what is this, you know. Just like any sports you go in, what is this? Hurl? What do I do? And you take it from there. Do you know?

Brian: Yeah, brilliant. And my next kind of question is retention of young male singers in the choir. What do you, what do you think is important as a conductor and leader to do in order to retain the young boys in the choir?

Colin: It's all about the music for me. It's the repertoire. It's like making sure that, like they, there's, there might be parts in there for them that they can excel. And I just like the social aspect of it, for sure. You know. I mean they go off like I always give them breaks and stuff, and they go off, and then they come back like you know.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: So at that age you just let them be themselves. And then when they come back in, even in choir, I let them be themselves. You know, there's a bit of craic, if they are shouting, I'm like, seriously, come on.

Brian: They're there for friends as well as the music. Yeah, yeah.

Colin: Exactly, but the repertoire is the one thing that will really, for me that works.

Brian: The next question I have. I know you've talked about this a lot, but if you want to kind of summarise kind of the main points is teaching young males vocal technique. And I know you've talked about this a lot in this interview. But if you want to, maybe give top two or three bullet points of what are important.

Colin: Well, the first for me would be that they understand you know, the anatomy of the voice. And what's actually happening, do you know. And also compare it to like a female voice. You know you're getting shows in their voice box, you know. Have them look in the mirror really talk about the technique and the idea of their chords growing. And that's why they get longer. So, all of a sudden you start to talk about this, naturally, you know.

And the female voice, and what happens to them? Well, they had to go through different developments. They don't, you know. You can talk about and the idea of what happens during. Are we gone?

Brian: Can you see me?

Colin: I can see it, but you're, you're pause. Can you see.

Brian: Oh, yeah, yeah, I don't. Something went wrong with my Internet there. Sorry about that.

Colin: Thanks.

Brian: It's just saying my Internet connection is unstable. Sorry about that.

Colin: You're grand, you're grand, so what was the same, I was rumbling on about.

Brian: I actually heard everything you said there. So, from my perspective, I have everything you said.

Colin: Oh, yeah, just to really, technically, to discuss the idea of, for them, what's going to happen? The length of time, you know. Like this isn't going to happen overnight. For some people, it does and then there's others, it's going to take two, three, four years. But you're going to get to a stage of development that you're really ready to sing again like and be a man, you know. And depending on the, it's all very individual. So you have to mind them all, or work with them individually, and also to be mindful of where they're at in terms of their they might have been singers before, albeit in you know, in, you know, musicals and all of that growing up in drama schools, and then they come, and they're getting lessons in the secondary school. And you, you know, mindful that they've had a successful singing career to date, and that has to continue. You know. But they just need to know it's going to change. It's going to be different. You know, you're going to either be a tenor or a bass. What's that? And explain it to them and take it from there.

Brian: Brilliant, brilliant, and my last question in this section is the importance, what you perceive to be the importance of having mentors and vocal role models for the boys going through voice change in your choirs?

Colin: Yeah. Well, I suppose, I suppose I kind of touched on that before. You know that there's a history of you know, for people now that are coming into these choirs, there's a history of the choir there. And it's established, and you know oh, so and so is in like the [named choir], and they're on a scholarship because they were in this choir and things like that. And you know, sending them to things like the [named choir], and just, you know, send them up there, summer schools and things if they want, you know. Just give them knowledge of that. But like in terms just for them to understand that, you know they're not, for a lot of people, I think the idea of a choir if they've never been in it, is kind of impossible, and even now it's not even there, really, but like we'll be the Sunday choir at mass. That this is actually something exciting. And it's something, really, it's a huge skill. And when they get hooked on us, it's like, Well, I want this. Okay, I'm not in school anymore, where can I get this again? Do you know? And for them to know that, you know the boys that used to be in the choir with them like when they came in in in their first year into the tenors. There you go, just swim, you know, and then to see that these lads were like singers, how they were singing and that they went on further. And I can say that because my own son would be an actual, he's gone through that. He's, like his mentors were always like, you know, [named child] and [named child] and all of that, cause my own kids came through the choir as well, you know.

Brian: Great fantastic. I might move on to the last section, which is basically in this section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing, going, and to start with, what are your general thoughts about the participation of boys singing in choirs in Ireland? As a general.

Colin: Just in general, my thoughts would be. And just this is probably just coming from my own, my own career, from actually singing in a cathedral choir in a sacred setting, through to today, do you know? And I think religion has had a lot of a lot of, through that change it has had the idea of choirs being only just bound by sacred music. And only being bound by, you know the stable pieces that are there. And you know, then the issues

that happened with religion over the years, and how parents are pulling, have pulled away from that, and the encouragement is gone in a different way, in terms of it's not just only sacred music, and also, more importantly, would be the development of and social platforms like the Internet, and that find material new material that is like Whoa, Whoa! This is a different instrument altogether. You know, this isn't just a piano, this is like a big organ that we can do different things with, and that everyone in the whole world is experimenting with this instrument at the same time. And I think it's a definitely the idea of, and it's I think there's still a lot of when you talk about choirs in, and I'm talking about my own experience here. There's still a lot of a little bit of and what would you say? Probably I suppose it's probably a little bit of reluctancy in terms of what the religious side of what it used to be. Choirs, I don't know. Now, if I find that, do find that here in [named area]. But that's definitely changing for the better, you know. And I suppose, but it's still not there still, not culturally in our culture. This the idea. Of course, it is in a community base, but really in terms of kids growing up, it's kind of not still not quite there yet, you know. It's getting there, I suppose, when these kids go on and maybe have families of their own and realise, just like happens up in [named area] now, you know. Well, you should get into that choir. It's great craic, or you know, and I see it with siblings coming from older, you know, it's happening at the moment, like I have one guy who joined the choir this year, and he has a developing voice. He's only in first year, and he's like loving this going on trips. And you know, just absolutely loving the social aspect to it and what it's all about. And that just came from his sister, you know, and his parents support supporting it. But the other side of it the sad side to me really is that it's still kind of half supported kind of really it's half supported in every way. In terms of like. For example, if it was, if the if the like local GAA Club here was going up to Dublin to play a big match. You know the whole town will be there. But, like we went up to [named choir] or to [named venue] to sing with an American choir and a collaboration choir, I might say about four parents came, do you know?

Brian: The standard of music at that would have been just unbelievable, like.

Colin: Yeah, like for the kids. This was incredible, like, you know, but like for the parents, they were just going to choir, do you know. So there's a little bit a little kind of tinge of it's kind of sad that they're not fully behind us. If you know what I mean. You know.

Brian: And one final question, I suppose, for you. And this is a really broad question about like boys singing in all of Ireland across the board from when they're very, very young, right up until they're grown adults like you could change one or two or three things. If you wave a magic wand like, what information would you like for the general public to know about boys changing voices, and what could be done to get more boys singing in Ireland in general, across the board from primary school to secondary school. Your youth, choir.

Colin: Yeah.

Brian: Even just a few kinds of things that you think you'd like to see, and information that you'd like people to know?

Colin: I suppose. Like for boys, it's a like when you're when you're in in primary school. I have a thing about schools as well. Because I have, we have, we are on our own. We're not a school choir, when somebody relates to choirs, it's always school choirs. So, the school choir of the year, the school, whatever school choirs, school choirs under sixteen school choirs whatever. And I fought with everybody on the scene to try and get anything I could possibly get for my kids to be allowed to be involved in something that isn't a school related, and performance competition whatever. It's just everyone just goes. Oh, school choirs. And then youth choirs, university choirs whatever. So I've always had a lot of, and a lot of issues with that. Nobody seems to really see that like that. There's more than just school choirs there. This thing is bigger than in schools, do you know? And I suppose I maybe I would, I am maybe different in that respect that I'm not a school in terms of what I've done for my kids' choir especially because I think at that age is when they get it. And boys need to be involved at that age. If they could be involved in a choir, you know. Yeah, actually, it's going to become from primary schools and on the on the bigger bases. And there are some fantastic primary school choirs out there with great conductors doing great stuff and a lot of the time it's possibly maybe if those conductors really knew what they had in front of them, do you know? And that's where the training could be, do you know. A lot of the time, it's more just an extra activity in school or something. It's not really fully part of, you know the curriculum. Whereas if it was more

integrated into those primary schools in terms of singing, you know, singing lessons like what I'm doing down in school there. It would be very different, you know, and it would take it out of the hands of the cathedral choir schools, if you like, and into life. Normalise it. And then, when it's coming into secondary school, it should be there as well.

Brian: It's interesting. I've asked this question to a lot of people, but I think what you're saying there makes so much sense. The idea of the singing lessons then linked to choir.

Colin: Yeah

Brian: Think you're onto something there, I think.

Colin: Yes. Well, I'm kind of living proof of it to be honest.

Brian: I think so. Yeah.

Colin: Because it is really like and that that's for that for me. That's where I started, because I mean before the choirs. I mean. I have. Obviously, I conducted the [named ensemble]. I deputised in the I was in the [named choir] as well, [named choir], blah, blah and I deputised in those as well in actually in schools. When they were doing this delivering their schools' programs. [Named conductor] was the conductor, and he couldn't be there a few times, and I'd always jump in and do those little workshops with them. You know, kids loved it, you know. Yeah. And even for them to hear this, you know. And I mean, I just loved like I just loved, for example, [named area], this year, like I had to fight hard to get my kids to actually go to that competition, because there aren't many of my choirs is like what you said, it's kind of unique, but there's no but like there's nowhere for them to go, do you know? And that's actually what happened with the with the youth choir then, because I got on to [named area] and asked them, please, please, can you let my children's choir do the primary school choirs so they can see other kids their own age singing. And so this year they allowed that to happen, you know, which is great. And then this and then but they also got rid of the youth choir out of the actual the secondary school choirs, because we used to it, used to be youth choirs and secondary school choirs, because, I asked many years ago, could we come and let them

hear and compete with secondary school choirs? But then there were complaints because we were so good! They kicked us out and set up a youth choir section on a different day. But that's the battles that you come across, but it's all purely for them. Do you know, purely for them? And just remind me what? What was your what was your question.

Brian: Broad things that could be changed, you know, to make participation better in Ireland?

Colin: I think that's probably one thing would be like. So yes, definitely schools. But there has to be a social, and there has to be like a local integration as well, like not just school choirs, because the kids don't want to do it in school. Because mainly in the school environment, the teachers want to do it for themselves and they will, it's a different environment. It's not like a social environment. Because if the teacher wants to go and win that competition. It's all down to the teacher, nothing to do with the kids themselves. So, I find maybe school is the wrong, and it's yes, it's a good place to find your voice, but, like the culture of actually singing in a choir in a sociable way, is completely different, and it should probably that it's very different environment, what I have. And that's why the kids will come to my choir, and they don't want to be in that choir, because this is fun, and also I understand their repertoire and all of that kind of stuff. You know.

Brian: And so it's kind of what you're saying is that they don't see it like school. Is that one of the points you're trying to make?

Colin: They don't see it as school and also going back to what I said in the beginning, which is like the really, the teachers don't understand, maybe for, and the majority of teachers are just maybe teachers that have maybe done music, and they're just trying a choir. And they have to learn, and it's a learning curve for them, and it'd be quite stressful. And you can see two, three, four teachers involved in the choir trying to get it over the line and all that, so that can be very stressful for any kid. And all they want to do is saying and do their very best and enjoy the music that they're singing. So, there's a kind of a there's a, there's just something that needs to be fixed there do you know? So maybe not. Some kind of a national programme in terms of like, in terms of schools,

because reading schools is where it will be delivered but for teachers to be properly introduced to training. Because I know these conductors like when it happens to them, they want to know all this knowledge. They want to know that knowledge. Do you know, where are they going to get it, you know. So interesting. Yes.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: Rambling on.

Brian: Any other points you want to make. Before I conclude.

Colin: Not really just wish you the very best.

Brian: Yeah.

Colin: Can I throw in there, don't be afraid to get in touch.

Brian: Thank you so much for doing this. I'm going to just stop the recording now. Thank you so much for being part of this.

Appendix G
Interview Transcript – David

Brian: Okay, so good morning, David, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male, adolescent voice change. And, to start with, I'd like to maybe look a little bit at your background as a choral singer, and your own experience of growing up learning about singing and the voice, and also maybe a little bit about your experience of voice change if you remember it happening when you were younger.

David: Absolutely, so as a choral singer, I've been involved in it for almost thirty-five years. My initial training came as a boy soprano in [named area] as part of the [named choir], which sadly no longer exists at the time. In the early to [named years] it was run by [named conductor], who's now the [named other role]. And so it was. It was. I guess it was based on template set by the [named choir] in [named area]. [Named conductor] gained his training in [named area)], and wanted to bring something similar up to [named area] and I guess by osmosis got a lot of my training through that choir. You know. I don't particularly remember musicianship classes, or anyone talking to me about the technical side of things, of singing at that age. At five or six I went in, and I sang my hymns and my roman chants and everything else, and you know, and dwelt in that way. I also went to, you know, singing lessons from a young age, and sort of sang through that I went through the ranks, as happens with singers through youth choirs, the city of [named choir], [named choir], and I suppose particularly that's when you know my voice was changing, and I was finding that my I was. I was joining new parts in the choir. So, at around, my voice changed at a slightly late stage. I was a soprano until I guess fourteen, and then it started to change then. So about fifteen, I joined the [named choir] and went on from there and trained as a tenor at the [named college], where I was even then, even though I was training as a soloist, I maintained kind of a part of their [named choir] and joined the [named choir], so very quickly gained. I guess the professional expectations of choral singing, as well as well as getting an insight at an early stage as to how to work with boy singers, and particularly maybe boys going through that change through the work that the [named conductor] did and still does at the [named choir]. And now I still

sing sometimes, but obviously more involved in the training and coal side of things, in my work, in schools, and everything like that.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic, brilliant, brilliant, and in terms of your own professional background. Would it be possible to maybe tell me a little bit about your education in choral conducting. Both formal education, and then, after that, maybe informal education that relates directly to adolescent changing voices. So, I suppose, for your formal education. If you could maybe talk about that. And was there anything in that that related to changing voices in your training? And then any informal training that you've done like maybe kind of courses or books you've read or online kind of classes that you've done that relate to the adolescent, changing voice.

David: Absolutely well. The vast majority of my training has come really from practical experience. It's a shame to say I'm not as learned as some conductors would be, with regards to the literature and things like that. Hopefully that might change, but formally in between [named years], and around there I did the masters in conducting at [named college)], and lucky enough to have been taught by [named teacher], and because she's such vast experience in working with kids at that age. Firstly, I gained, we talked a lot about working with young voices and particularly boys' voices, but it's almost as part of the masters, or it was slightly coincidental, but as part of the masters, you know, I was [named position] there at the [named choir], so we used my role. The specified role was working with the [named choir]. So that's the boys who were just getting beyond the boy's soprano stage and starting to just lose, but also find their voices. And so, it was my job to kind of help them with that. And we talked a lot about that during my time with [named conductor] and during my training and then, I suppose, sort of informally speaking again, it really has just been through experience Brian, and going on my own feelings on what I experienced when my voice changed, but dealing with situations as and when they come along. But as my career has progressed, It's kind of become honed in closer and closer to boys and girls, but of that age. So I guess I can draw on a wide range of experiences in the [named choir] through [named college], and now, as director of [named choir], where the core age of children in [named choir] are exactly that age where boys are, I don't want to use the word struggling, but a lot of them are struggling to know exactly what to do with their voices. So, I suppose, training wise it really is, I've drawn

upon just my own knowledge and experience, and I guess trial and error at times, you know, but I'd like to think that they're good, you know. They're intelligent trials and things that I know are going to have an impact.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. And just before I move on, just no other kind of informal training or kind of books you've read about, or kind of courses that you've on that have mentioned adolescent voices? And it's totally okay. But if you haven't, I'm just wondering.

David: I'm just trying to think the only times that I would have discussed like the ins and outs of the voices, or learned from another person, would have been, we did a few sessions with [named singing teacher] who is such an expert on all things, on the voice. And we definitely discussed the physiology of the changing voice, and I guess the need for care and the need for sort of gentle coaxing of the voice in that regard. But I'm afraid I don't think that, you know. I don't think that I've gained it from literature, or anything like that.

Brian: Fantastic, excellent! That's brilliant. And so, I might move on to the next section of the interview, which is professional practices. And the first thing I'd like to ask is, could you share the specific experiences that you have working with male adolescents going through voice change? So, if you could just name some of the choirs, past and present, but also what kind of choirs were they were the school choirs, youth choirs, maybe a little bit about the voicing that we're in the choirs, etc.

David: Absolutely, I suppose, working backwards, my current role at [named school], where I'm head of music, and one of the big parts of the job is developing and maintaining the choral tradition at [named school] I think that I took over the role [named year] when not only boys, but like, as you well know, choirs were decimated, and at that age it's hard to re-encourage children to get back into singing when they haven't been when there's been a gap in their kind of experience, so say, over the last three or four years. It's been my remit to encourage boys to sing chorally again. And so, there was a combination of getting boys at the later stages of their school time. So at age seventeen to eighteen, where their voices might be a little bit more settled just to give it a go, but

actually, maybe more importantly, find the twelve year olds, the thirteen year olds, who are at such an insecure time in their lives, but who may not have sung ever because of Covid, and whatever else, to get them into singing whatever, using their voices in any way. So, my approach to that, so in [named school] we have our [named choir], which is traditionally an SATB choir but because of numbers. Very quickly, as I'm sure other people will have mentioned to you that became, you know apart from some exceptions, an SAB choir, and B for baritone, not B for bass, you know.

Brian: That's something we'll definitely talk about later, the idea of SAB, because this comes up in a lot of my conversations. So I'd love to hear your opinions on that. Maybe at a later section, if that is ok?

David: Great, absolutely. And then, similarly, for the changing voice, I founded a junior voices choir, which is for just for first years, boys and girls, but the idea is that boys who join the SATB choir, the [named choir], either they didn't know where to sit vocally speaking, or they weren't happy, comfortable, sitting with the girls in the altos. So, I've wanted to just make this junior voice choir where everyone sang the same thing. So this is so, even if the boys' voices are starting to change, it doesn't matter if they sing in a treble clap octave or in an octave lower, so that everyone's kind of feeling equal and feeling encouraged. So that's that. I also teach a number of boys one on one singing. Is this just a do you want to know? Just chorally.

Brian: Yeah. Well, actually, go on. Go on with what you're saying, because I think it is relevant. Yeah.

David: Okay. I teach a number of boys in [named secondary school] sort of one on one who also sing in my choirs. You know the kind of the boys who have a real a real interest in it. And it's been it's very, it's been very interesting for me, and very enlightening, because one particular boy, his voice had broken, aged ten, and he came in with this beautiful baritone sound into the school straight away, which has, which was a completely different approach from, say, maybe some of the boys who now they're going into third year, and their voices are just kind of settling. And so, my approach with them and with the boys in the choir is to just constantly stop them from pushing. I find more so

than the girls, there's a keenness with the boys who are there to really get out there and really impress and really be like I have to be, you know, at the forefront.

Brian: Is it ok David, for the moment, if we just stick with just naming the choirs that you work with, a lot of this stuff will come up later in the interview if that's okay?

David: Absolutely so separate from the [named school] then my work with [named choir], which is the [named choir]. Boys and girls, aged fourteen to eighteen, and that is connected with [named choir], which I don't conduct, but I would work with their kind of moving their singers that are moving on. So, I'd work with singers of that age. I also conduct the [named choir], which definitely doesn't involve adolescent boys.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant or fantastic, that's great. And when with these different groups, what would you consider in terms of working with adolescent boys? What did you consider your tasks and responsibilities to be for those emerging young male singers?

David: Having gone through it myself. Brian, at the forefront of my mind, is dealing with the changes in confidence in their voice, the changes in confidence in themselves. There are obviously exceptions where some boys just go, they don't care, you know. They just do it, and that's great. But I think that it's such a strange time for them in like socially, and that has an impact in sort of, musically speaking, as well. So, my, one of my main priorities is to keep encouraging. Keep their targets realistic, whether it's the lines are singing on the page, or just what they're singing in their in their warm-ups and their exercises, and make them feel valued, even if at times, when there's a real break in the voice that they and they're contributing very, very little, but what they are contributing is valuable, and it's for the long term, but also, I think, nurturing it in a way that you know the change of voice, it's such a strange thing, because it's so unique and so different to everybody that there are boys who can keep singing their soprano range, you know, for such a long time, and to allow them to do that to not make them feel that they're being pushed. You're not suddenly a tenor, and suddenly a bass, and even myself, if I can just go on this little quickly tangent, because this is where I draw it from.

Brian: That's relevant, very relevant.

David: I don't. I trained as a tenor, but I'm not a tenor, and I can sing bass, but I'm not a bass. I've always thought of myself just as a singer that fits into whatever angle works in that moment. So, it's allowing the boys to explore that, give them the time and the space to not be set into a place in choir, but that they can contribute in whatever way their voice and their development allows them to. And then the third one is that because it's a key time that it's a key time sort of developmentally for them, they might not be contributing as fully as they want, vocally speaking, but use that time then to find other skills, whether it's musicianship, whether it's even leadership roles within the choirs, and just to make sure that they don't sink away into the back rows, and we don't hear from them in any way. You know.

Brian: Yeah, so kind of in a way, you're saying that like for this moment the social element of it, and kind of like keeping them engaged, the change from maybe moving from an upper voice choir to an SATB choir. Maybe partially, your priority is a social thing to keep them engaged rather than it all being about vocals. That kind of what you're saying?

David: Absolutely. It is what I'm saying, and the value that their value is still felt. I mean, you can go from. If you're a good boy, soprano in whether this is right or wrong, if you're a good boy soprano, you're noticed you're one of the most important people in the choir, or you know, you might feel like it, and very quickly you go to the back rows, and you're not doing very much. And these girls, who are fifteen to sixteen, with beautiful soprano voices, are suddenly the most important ones. And that can be very discouraging, and I've seen it, and I felt it. So that's, I think that that's true, you know, I do believe that. So, it's yeah. So absolutely so a social thing and a leadership thing that they're still contributing whether they're suggesting repertoire, they might have other musical contributions to the choir. It's a social and a value thing.

Brian: Fantastic, and the next thing I was hoping to ask you is when you joined these organisations, say the youth choir and the school choir were there any kind of gaps in knowledge that you kind of had to go back and fill in kind of quickly, that when you arrived in this place. It was like, 'oh, I need to kind of learn something about this', or, you

know, in relation to the adolescent, changing voice. Was there anything kind of choir specific that you were like 'okay, I need to really look into this a bit more.'

David: Yeah. So when I was conducting the choirs, do you mean?

Brian: When you became the conductor of these choirs. Was there anything kind of gaps in the knowledge that you kind of had to fill in about changing voices?

David: Yeah, absolutely. The main thing that I can remember when I when I started working in the [named choir] was the access that boys have to the falsetto range as someone who is by no means a falsettist. I don't have access to that part of my voice. But it was so impressive and so interesting and so enlightening, that some of the boys who had sung soprano and were opening their head voice in a specific way, I think, for that choir, could still reach it, even though their natural voices were getting lower and lower, their speaking voices were getting lower and lower. So, it's not that I went back and retrained, but I certainly worked a lot on my own voice in with regards to how we're reaching that and accessing that.

Brian: So you're saying that the boys needed more information on this, and you kind of fill in the gaps in your knowledge to help them? Kind of yeah?

David: Yeah one hundred percent. The gap in my knowledge is because it wasn't, it wasn't something that was ever talked to me about when I, in my training, and it was, it was really exciting and enlightened to know that this is a possibility and something that actually, I know I would encourage boys with a change of voices to kind of allow access to wherever is, is there, do you know? So, they taught me a little bit in that regard some of those wonderful boys in the [named choir] and we worked on that. And, as I say, we didn't. Then, when we were doing our musicianship or our vocal lessons, we didn't do tenor songs. We did songs that allowed them the freedom to sing in whatever way they wanted.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. Any other, with your other choirs, any other gaps in knowledge that you discovered?

David: Let me just think with regards to. Sorry to just make sure?

Brian: With regards to adolescent voice change. So, when you're working with the boys who are going through voice change. Was there anything with any of the choirs where you were kind of like 'oh, I really need to read up on this a bit more, or I need to work on this a bit more.'

David: I suppose one of the things that I the second thing that I think of that is kind of I'm thinking about a lot now is a couple of boys in my [named choir]. Say they're now, they're going into fourth year, so they would be going, coming on sixteen. And so, the voices have been changing for the last two years, and I would have maybe set them, as you know, thought that they're going to be tenors, because at the early stages of the voice changing, they could reach their E's and their F's. But as time's going by, it's actually that's becoming more and more difficult for them. And what, I wonder? I'm wondering this out loud, Brian. I don't have the answer to it. I'm sure you would, but and I'll research it I'll look into it. Is that you know. Is that a permanent thing? Are their voices getting lower? Or is that just part of the you know I'm wondering. Is that part of the process, will it? Will it? Will they find it again? Will it go back up again, you know? Should I, should I help them again through your head, voice, sound, or whatever should I help them find those higher ranges, or do we accept that? The voices just get lower, you know?

Brian: Yeah, so that's kind of something to look into definitely. Yeah.

David: For sure.

Brian: That's great, and the next section is challenges and successes. So, this is, if you could describe challenges and successes that you've encountered while working with young adolescent males going through voice change. So maybe we could start with a few challenges, and they can be musical or non-musical challenges when working with boys.

David: I think that the primary challenge, and I've kind of alluded to it already, but the primary challenge is it's a confidence thing. I certainly find in [named choir] that a large portion of the boys, like it's almost as if they don't want to be there, and I know that's not true, because they wouldn't if they didn't. But their confidence in just giving it a go is so much lower than it would have been when they were in [named choir], and so much lower than their girl, their female counterpoints, counterparts, and I assume that that's going to be a continual challenge that I, you know, kind of embrace, and it's part of my how I work. I work in a kind of an encouraging and positive environment. So that's fine and connected with that, the challenge in [named school] is absolutely recruitment and absolutely boys of that age, twelve to thirteen, just saying, you know, it doesn't matter where your voice is at right now. Our choirs in [named school] are non-auditioned. There's no expectation set for them. They don't have to go through a test to join the choir. So, it's the biggest challenge, and I'm sure you've heard that lots of times, but it's absolutely recruitment and having them involved. I think that, vocally speaking, sorry. It's sort of actually, technically speaking, on the other end of the spectrum a challenge that I actually find is then boys who are very good. You know we probably know the same people, but I won't name any names, but then they do too much. So, it's like finding that really right balance, finding exactly the right repertoire, because I don't know, again, I would love to know, but I would imagine that a large portion of choral and even solo repertoire, but very little of it was written for that voice. It was written for all other ends of the spectrum. So, whether it's solo repertoire or even choral SATB repertoire, it is a challenge to find the right music that suits.

Brian: I'll have a little bit. We'll talk about that, maybe a little bit later in the repertoire section. Any like successes that you've had working with your various groups in terms of the boys, and that can be kind of, you know, an individual success story for a boy, you know, that maybe wasn't singing and then started singing really well for you? Or it could be boys, you know, in the in the choir, music and non-musical.

David: I think that looking at looking at [named choir], which is, I guess, the bulk of my core experience at the moment. I look at, I take what we've achieved in two or three years with [named choir] as a as a success in general, with the back rows with the boys. I don't take full responsibility for it, it's the team within, [named choir]. But what we decided to

do a year or two ago, inspired by [named choir] is give them real one-on-one attentive time with singing, coaching, and smaller sectionals, so that in a larger rehearsal setting, I am not saying 'tenors you've sung that wrong', or whatever else, they gain their confidence through sorting things out in small groups, so that when they're in the bigger group, they have a little bit more confidence that what they're doing is correct. And I don't mean necessarily note-wise. I just mean sort of, vocally speaking, so we'll talk a lot. Sorry. Stop me if this is the wrong tangent, but we'll talk a lot to them technically about how they sing these notes and explain to them that if it's too high or it's too low, they don't have to try and sing it, but as long as they're comfortable trying it, they do sing it, and I've absolutely noticed the difference in the contribution from the back rows. Well, they're not always back rows. But you know what I mean, from the boys and things like that. And I think, from a from a, if we're talking about successes, I've one particular student at [named school], who I just adore working with. I mean, not just because he's exceptional. But he's the boy that I mentioned. I knew him, I've known him from eleven, and from eleven he was almost a fully formed bass, which is just the most bizarre thing. But still, at that age. We're still working through musical and like mature development in his person. But almost there's lots of technical things that we don't have to touch on that I would have to work on with other boys. So, it's just a very different experience. But just what it's the nature of working with those kinds of voices that every single thing is experience is different. You know.

Brian: So that sounds like a real success story in [named choir] which you mentioned there. Which is so? Is it kind of the idea of that, obviously they go to choir, and they learn their music and choir. But there's a whole ecosystem kind of learning around them, a support system that that develops them from many different angles. Is that kind of what you're saying there?

David: Before I started in [named choir], or not before, when I started in [named choir], I think that there's a general feeling of we go there and we learn our music, and sing as sort of as efficiently and outwardly as we can, which is great and wonderful. But it's not always possible, especially for I think, especially for the boys' voices. So yes, it's creating that their [named amount of time] that we've got on the [rehearsal day], gives them an opportunity to excel musically in in lots of different possible ways. So, if on any,

at any given time in their lives, they're not able to one hundred percent vocally commit. They are still adding to themselves, you know, giving them again, it's that value thing. They're adding value to themselves and feeling that they're getting value from their choral experience.

Brian: Fantastic, any other successes, or are we happy when we move on?

David: Well, okay. Well, I mean, I suppose I think that the work that I did it was very short sadly, but the work that I did at the [named choir] with the changing voices there. I'd like to think that there's a success there. I mean, it's a wonderful kind of ecosystem that's already been created, and I just sort of slotted into it.

Brian: Any particular like things that you did, or you felt that you brought? What did you bring to them that you felt was a success?

David: A combination of being able for them to see, you know, as a teacher, as an educator, I like that I can show them. I'm an okay singer. I can show them what they can aim for, and some of those boys are sort of now singing as tenors. So I'd like to think that my influence through singing lessons, through carefully chosen repertoire, and through just general sort of one-on-one conversations and discussions, I now know I can see them now as sort of men in the choir, which is kind of odd, but you know I take a certain degree of satisfaction from it.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant, fantastic. I might move on to the next section, which is the key qualities of effective conductors. So in the next section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers, and to start with what, in your views are the traits and skills and that, you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change? So I suppose for me, like traits are kind of. You know what are you like as a conductor in front of them? And skills is more like this is the knowledge that I need to work with changing voices?

David: So traits. I think that firstly, I think that a definite understanding. Yeah, like an understanding of the specific voices that's in front of you, if that makes sense? So yeah. So, because particularly for boys, in my, in my view, particularly for boys, every single voice is different, you know, like at that age. So, you might not be able, I think, that it might not be wise to address an entire section of tenors at fifteen years of age, because they're all at various different stages. Oh, you're frozen, Brian, are you? Oh, you're back! Sorry.

Brian: I've lost you. Sorry. And so yeah, it just says, my Internet's unstable. Sorry about that.

David: No problem!

Brian: If you could repeat that again. I'm sorry what did you say again? Something about knowing the voices that are in front of you?

David: Sure, I think one of the key traits is the understanding of the voices that are in front of you, which sounds so obvious, but it's an understanding and appreciation of the individual voices. I think more so with the, with the changing voice and with young boys. I think that it's quite from my experience, it can be quite dangerous to say tenors you know. You have a load of fifteen-year-old tenors, which means so many different things. So, tenors, 'you're not doing this, or can you do this or whatever'. Because they're at such different levels and such different stages vocally speaking. So, a trait of, I think the word is empathy, but it's just an emotional intelligence that certain things don't get dealt with in the full rehearsal space at that at that age. And it's not that you ignore them. There are just other ways, I think, to kind of deal with them.

Brian: That's kind of like also David, like the fact that you know all their individual voices, there's a real connection there that you've put the effort into to know about the challenges and the opportunities that they have to develop for each individual person. It sounds like there's a real connection there with your singers.

David: I think that it's almost, I don't mean this in this kind of in as aggressive way it might come across, but I think it's really irresponsible, if you're a conductor of teenagers, and you don't know them individually. I think that there are ways, and you don't need to know them all personally, or you know, whatever else. But there are ways to get to know. And most youth conductors do, of course, and it's what we do, and it's part of our job. But it's a very important key element, I think, of working, especially at that age group, because of the various stages where they are at, you know. I also think just maybe an adapt, an adaptability to the situation which you're put into. So you know myself conducting at [named school] and [named choir], and if I would be then say, filling in with someone with a children's choir, like they all work at different paces, and there are different levels and different expectations, and meet at different times. So an ability to adjust to the voice the voices that's in front of you as well is an important trait. If that if that makes sense? You might have, you know, a choir such as our [named choir] with our [named school choir], [named choir], with four boys in the back row, and then move to [named choir], where there's twenty of them, and know how to in that moment, if it's short notice, or if you can plan for long term, be able to adjust whether it's your own rehearsal, approach your repertoire choice, or just your communication with those people. Again, I think these are all connected, Brian. So, apologies if I'm repeating myself. But I'm just always.

Brian: Traits and skills is what we're looking at.

David: And then I just think the last trait is the last trait I can think of is just a constant reminder and awareness of inclusion like that that you know that everybody is there and everybody is valued. Sometimes I find myself getting a little bit distracted with the sopranos and altos in front of me, because they just constantly make wonderful and brilliant sounds. And you know you have to stop yourself from honing in on that and working just with the female voices or the upper voices in front of you. And always a reminder that these boys in the back rows are a doing their best, but be going to continue to be so valuable as they get older. You know, in other choirs. Skills, absolutely communication and absolutely understanding the understanding, the voice understanding how to explain access to certain notes. And I'm talking, maybe technically here.

Brian: That's important, I think, in this question is technical skills the conductors need to know.

David: Sure, absolutely. I mean, it goes without saying that as a choral conductor you should understand the voice. You don't necessarily have to be able to reproduce the sound that you want. It helps, you know. I think, that, personally speaking, the gaps in my knowledge of literature, or whatever is replaced by my just knowledge of the voices as someone who studied it. But yeah, it's very, very important again, especially for everybody, but especially for the changing voices. If one thing isn't working, then the adaptability to understand technically, you can try different things to achieve the same result, because it's always possible. And then, knowing that there are different ways to describe things. Personally, I am quite a visual person, you know, sort of describing spaces and opening things and colours and things like that, whereas other conductors and teachers might really go more into the nitty gritty of the larynx and the soft palate and things like that, and both are just as valid. But knowing that, having the skill to approach that technical side of things in various ways can only add, it can only be advantageous to both you as a conductor, and the singers themselves.

Brian: Yeah.

David: You know, and skills wise? Yeah, do you know, Brian, I think it's all about communication, because I was going to say, then, to be able to communicate exactly what you want, you know, obviously sort of as a conductor. But then, specifically with the boys, voices at different times, whether it's just getting them to not push so much or not, you know not try quite so hard. Being able to do that in an in a way that doesn't make them feel like you're telling them to, you know, disappear off into the background. Really, they're the ones that's what I can think off the off the top of my head at the moment. And it's really communication based, you know, and making sure that everybody is, is encouraged.

Brian: Fantastic. And if you were working with, if you had an assistant conductor working with you, or a new aspiring conductor who's going to be working with

adolescent voices. What advice would you give them? What would you ask? What would you say to them to do? Maybe two or three points?

David: Yeah. I do have a really wonderful assistant conductor with [named choir], and it's something that we talked about when [named person] began working with us, and continue to address particularly with our bases for next year. And again. One of the things that we decided last year. The first thing was that almost we would allow the boys to work at their pace. So I know that that maybe doesn't always work because their pace, teenage boys pace on a [rehearsal day] can be quite slow. But what I mean there is that if they want to continue exploring one passage of music because it's just not quite working, we don't say 'no, you've learned the notes and you move along.' So, we find a comfortable yeah, what is comfortable for them. I don't want them to feel, yeah, sorry I'm going off a tangent. But yeah, that's the first thing, find a find, a pace that that works for them, while also making sure that things are progressing nicely. Secondly, to again, listen to each voice individually. That's something, you know, with our bases need a very, very different approach than the tenors, and not assume that, the assumption that I think some people make with changing voices, is that notes just end up being too high for the boys, and that's the biggest challenge. But it's not, you know. Sorry. Please do stop if this is a tangent, but this discussion me and my assistant had. But you know it's also so important that some of the boys will be basses and baritones, but don't know how to or don't haven't yet explored notes below C. And unfortunately, you know, SATB, scores involve notes much lower than C. So, let's not just focus on the boys, who are sort of not sure how to access their, you know, notes above the stave.

Brian: Any kind of like things that you would say to them just broadly to an aspiring conductor that wants to learn about the changing voices? Is there any way you can kind of include them in the rehearsal to hear the sound of those voices or things like that, like, or have them working with them in some way like, what would you recommend?
David: Well, yeah, I suppose to experience that, and to hear the various sounds and approaches of the changing voice, to maybe not necessarily sing not necessarily sing through repertoire, to have them singing on a sound, on a vowel, or choose one melody, and on one open sound and sort of explore how that can be accessed in different ways, using an ooo vowel or ahh vowel, just sort of, you know. Change the placement, and I

think that it's a very interesting thing if you find a middle of the road melody that would be comfortable for you or I, to see at what levels at you know at what stages different voices at that age group suddenly can't sing this one note, but can then go above the note. So, it's yeah, I think that would be the main thing that would do, not even just warmups, but find an exercise that you can move them through, and it's not you don't need to be conducting them, but to listen and explore on one vowel sound. There's so many different good and bad variables of how that would be approached.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. I have a few kind of shorter questions to ask, kind of quick-fire ones. Okay, that's okay. How do you approach the following aspects of the job? So, repertoire selection, like when you have changing voices in your choir, what kind of things are you looking for in the repertoire that might in one way allow them to develop their voice, but also that it's within their range and capabilities?

David: So if I'm looking at SATB repertoire because I think both parts for that age group have such different challenges for the basses. I look at really well, written voice leading so that the basses can explore the lower part of their voices and don't have to worry about suddenly jumping up a seventh or a fourth because there's enough going on, you know, for them. So, I do love, I encourage my basses to sing low, and I know I've discussed with some people that you maybe should avoid you know F's and E's and E flats with the basses. I'm not sure that that's my approach. I'm happy to be told that I'm wrong, but I don't mind them exploring that part of the voice, but I try my best, and to choose repertoire and actually to write repertoire that is, in quite stepwise motion, and maybe isn't quite as agile or doesn't require quite as much agility as you might allow with your upper voices, so that they can sing into it so they can find, because it really is finding that, isn't it? It's really where is my voice? So that when they do find it they can enjoy it, and they can sing it.

Brian: Other things in repertoire. Are you looking for? What aspects of a good piece for like, and it could be kind of you know the types of rhythms that are in it, or it could be ranges or words. What inspires them?

David: Yeah, absolutely, then so connectable text and not necessarily doesn't necessarily all have to be contemporary music, but text that they can, that they can relate to, whether it's the thematically more current themes within the music, or just stories that are kind of funny that they can they can joke about with, or I can joke about with them. So absolutely text for sure. And like, with all young people's repertoire music that like, were doing a programme in [named month] and it's [stated programme of their upcoming performance]. So, it's music [named music pieces]. And I think that's I think boys find that really. And they find that kind of thing really interesting other things to engage with besides where their voice is sitting. So, we'll talk about where the music comes from. And if it's a film theme tune, or you know a choral arrangement of a film song, then they can go and watch the movie and feel really connected with it. So other relatable features, for sure, so that they're invested in the in the process of it. Yeah. And then just note wise tenors wise. I, with SATB music, which I don't do, you know, very often, outside of [named choir]. I don't shy away from maybe this isn't relevant, but I don't shy away from allowing the altos to support the tenors at times, if needs be.

Brian: Okay, so that's very relevant. Yeah, more about that?

David: It's simply that it's again that idea of everybody's connected, and that nobody you know, of course, for sopranos, altos, tenors and basses, but we're all just singers. So, there's times when in [named choir], when it's not to say 'tenors, you can't do that.' It's just 'okay so the altos are going to sing the tenor one line' in the same way as I might ask tenors to sing a bass, one line, or whatever else. But it's very important to make that decision beforehand.

Brian: That leads me on very, very nicely to my next question, which is actually signing appropriate voice parts.

David: Okay.

Brian: And how do you deal with assigning voice parts? So when you when you're looking at someone, you're doing an audition, maybe. What's your approach, of dealing with changing voices going through the different SATB parts.

David: It might sound a little bit basic. But this is the honestly, I suppose the approach with the pressures of timings and things like that. Initially if I don't know the voice, if it's the first time I've met them I will almost deal with them on an on an age basis. So, if they're coming into my choir at the youngest age, I will ask them to join the tenors, unless it's clear that their voice, you know, hasn't broken, and they'll sing with the altos. And generally, if I feel like the voice is a little bit more mature, I would absolutely put them in the baritone section. It just sits in that nice place where they're not going to be pushing in any way, as their voice is beginning to really settle. But I think but I do have this, as I mentioned earlier, we're getting to know their voices. I sort of, I try to do that very quickly, and sort of I'm ready to adapt as quickly as we get to know their voices, you know.

Brian: And when you have, I know you mentioned this earlier, you have the boy that's maybe in early stages of voice change, and you're between butting him in the alto and the tenor section. He's kind of somewhere in between. Could you, I wonder, could you talk about a little bit like maybe reasons why you might put them into tenor over the alto for social reasons like, as opposed to vocal reasons. Is there kind of a balance there between what do you do with this kid? It's not just about their voice. It's like, if all the other boys are with the tenors and basses in the choir. Do you know what I'm saying? Kind of like, Is there a balance there, or what? How do you deal with that?

David: Yeah, absolutely. And I'm not sure that I kind of like that. That's a fact. But having gone through it myself and things like that I think you know, through sports and society in general, boys are encouraged when they're with boys doing the same things as them. There are obviously exceptions where there's some slightly more individual boys at that age, but it's they are the exception in comparison with girls. I think you know, that would be my observation. So, I think that if I asked a boy and he would have no problem singing with the altos to sit with the girls. I mean, he's terrified. So, you know, we have our two back rows of boy's voices, and I'll say, 'go and sing with the tenor ones'. But I think that can work to everybody's advantage, because the tenor one range can be with the repertoire, the difficulty of the repertoire we sing with [named choir], that can be out of reach for quite a number of boys. So then, you have that combination of the boy

feeling part of a section and feeling grown up and feeling that his voice is changing. But being able to then have such value and because he can sing sort of that mixture that that border between high tenor and low alto that most boys at that stage are beginning to struggle with.

Brian: Great. So, it's yeah. It's that idea that like this over labelling of voices, kind of that, we all have flexibility in our voices. Yeah.

David: Yeah, absolutely.

Brian: And the next thing is about retention of young male singers in the choir. Maybe some of the issues that you've encountered and some remedies to deal with that issue?

David: So, I look at school, my work in [named school] with that little bit as they get older. Not even as they get older. Sorry. So, throughout their time at school there's the constant battle between music and sports, and that's just the nature of it. There's also, I think just, I don't know if I can put my finger on it. I can try if it's if you need me to. But there's just as you go through that time in your life, there's they become so self-aware and so self-conscious, and so reluctant to put on [uniform], for whatever reason, because, you know, the choir is quite respected in school so ways around that. Being really careful, and this is in an educational setting, being really careful with your timetabling. And it sounds so basic. But it's I've absolutely made sure that they can't tell me that they have training at this time, because I know that they don't. So, I almost shape my calendar around, making sure that it's open to all members. If that makes sense. You know, and I suppose that's that is a general term as well. That is a general thing as well. Remembering that essentially, they are generally very, very busy at that age. They're doing everything. They're exploring everything. So, we have a responsibility to not say you have to do this at this time, like we have to always be changing and evolving as they're changing and evolving, if you know what I mean? Making ourselves making choir, making, singing open to them, so there's as little restriction, because it takes very little to discourage them, the tiniest little thing. And then what we do in [named school] is things like we have what's what is it called, because this this might be something sort of worth noting? We have an event in [named time of the year] called [named event], where essentially, it's all

[types of songs], all of the normal [types of songs] that you would sing in choir. But any formality is taken out of it. It's actually, you know, [named person] has come up with it, but you know it's held [in the school]. It's you know, we're singing [named genre of music], but we might be singing it with drums, with guitars, with a piano. The students are creating the performance, and they'll have their own little individual, and the choir will be involved at, you know, in slightly different ways. But it's, I think that's a good thing. I think the fact that the choir are seen as part of this slightly informal portrayal of music can only be good for all students, but I really am always thinking about particularly boys. So they might come in and make a mess of a hymn, but they're taking part, and they're being part of it. And they might think, oh, that was a bit of craic. So, you know, different approaches to music creation.

Brian: It's amazing how the perception of something could be changed. Where you just move something slightly, slightly, the direction slightly left that the perception of it has suddenly changed. And so I always find it's amazing how you know kids, that age would be surprised that, like the things they'd be singing on the back of the bus like.

David: Yeah.

Brian: The hymns, and all this, you know, they love the hymns and singing all these really old crackers, you know.

David: Absolutely, It sticks.

Brian: As you say, it's all about the perception of that. If you change, and, it's not this really serious kind of holy kind of thing, but actually, by slightly changing it, it makes it something that they will engage with.
David: It's a fine line, and I think because I think, in addition to that, I think a lot of my approach is to deformalise, even the rehearsal process. Even with [named choir], which is on a we work at a different standard. But I try so hard to be normal, and it's not that, you know. It's not that you have to be one of them, because we're not, you know, it's different rules, but I try so hard not to make it seem like this impossible mountain that they have to climb to sing a piece of music. It's just singing. So, a combination here that's

a really great way of putting it sort of changing the context, changing what their view of the music is. And that's for both people, by the way. That's for the boys who are singing it, but also the boys who you're seeing what you know, seeing it in front of them, and might think, 'oh, sure, I'll go and give that a go', and then I keep them, and I think then. Sorry, I think this still answers your question. I think one of the things off that worked for me in that sort of sense of slightly deformalising, is again the fact that I am a male and can sing and remember what it was like, and refer to it quite regularly, you know, to individuals and to small groups. They feel safe there with me, and I'm not saying, you know, I'm not saying that that's essential. But it's one of my tools to talk about my own experiences, and to use my voice as a way for them to understand that you know, if they're finding, if they're having difficulties right now that it it's not forever, it doesn't mean they can't sing.

Brian: Yeah. fantastic. And the next question I have is your approach. I'll put maybe two questions in together, and your approach to vocal technique with young adolescent males, and maybe a little bit about vocal anatomy and the use of the whole body. And to begin with, this and something you said earlier really interested me about that the school that you work in you teach some of those vocal lessons. Is that correct? And am I right in saying that some of those students are also in your choir?

David: That's correct.

Brian: So I've come across this in some of my interviews, where the conductor has also taught the students vocal lessons, and I'd be really interested to know how does like maybe improves your relationship with them within the choir, but also in terms of vocal technique with the choir, the effect that has on your choir the fact that you're so their teacher.

David: Okay. So, my approach, technically speaking, with boys and changing voices is to find the core of their voice, find where the dead centre of their voice lies, because again, it's all different. And it's going to change from week to week, from month to month, and we work around that. So, if it's, a number of boys voices who are just constantly developing. And we almost, we have no goals. We generally have no end points. We for a year or two we might not do exams. We definitely don't do competitions. So, the

repertoire that we choose we might sing our repertoire in a different key from week to week, we through our warmups and exercises, and we do quite extensive sort of chest, voice, and lower register exercises, and we find where they're singing today. Where is your voice today? It sort of sounds like I'm making this up, but we didn't. It's not something I really think about. But it's what we do.

Brian: It sounds like in your teaching that correct me if I'm wrong, that you're building them up to be flexible musicians? Is that kind of what you're saying? That's not like 'this is what we have to do always' kind of? You're building them up to be kind of, by changing things every week that you're giving them the skills to be flexible is that kind of what I'm hearing?

David: Yeah, to an extent. And like just opening various avenues, vocally speaking. But it's also more that again, it's an encouragement thing. It's also more that within the lesson that it doesn't feel like they're being strained. They're being, you know, they're being pushed because I push them sort of expectation, wise just within the lesson. But at no stage do we do songs, you know. Some days they might sing an F some days they might only just sing an E flat. So that's okay. So, we change the key and we approach it in that way. And as I say, then, because of what my training, my training was absolutely, very much about breath and everything about breath. So, and it's key that for all voices, of course. But again, I think so much more with boys' voices that any sense of strain from around the larynx and the neck is just avoided, because if you start straining at age fourteen to fifteen, to sing high notes or no notes, you never lose that. And again, I speak from experience, you know, I think, that I have issues personally from that, and I don't want to pass that on to the younger voices. So, we avoid that through very, very carefully choosing where we sing on any given day and making sure that the breath is maintained at all times. And then, yeah. So students in the choir, it's an interesting one. I suppose I don't know if this is what you mean, but I suppose the boys who I teach are probably the more advanced singers in the choir, and not because I teach them, but it's the other way around, they go for lessons because they're so enthusiastic and because they always sing. So, it's, I suppose, what works as an advantage is that I get more time with them, one on one, and I talk to them outside of choir about choir, and I ask them, 'how can we get more, boys?'. You know, 'what role can you play in recruitment and encouraging and

helping the other boys there?'. I see them do that. I mean, there's three or four of them, and I see that sort of mentioned to you about developing leadership roles, and you know other social rules within choirs with the boys. I can I absolutely see the boys who are extra keen, let's put it that way and have lessons, they're very, very. They understand the issues that we face. Yeah, they understand my panic whenever we only have one tenor and two basses in the choir, and they try their best to not discourage the boys, who might not be at the same level as them. And then also, you know, present the choir in a good light. So, the advantages actually aren't musical I actually don't think within the choir it's social and things like that.

Brian: What I what I should have added to the question is, suppose if you have a boy going through voice change, and he's looking for a singing teacher and you know they're asking around, what singing teacher should I get like? Is there an obvious advantage in terms of keeping them in choir, that the choir director is their teacher? like I can, you know that like, in order to keep them in choir rather than go, for like a singing teacher that's totally separate to choir. Is there an advantage there?

David: Oh, goodness! I mean other, I think, other than the connection. Again, it's all confidence and social, but other than maybe the connection that they have with me, and that they know that, like for them themselves, they know that the language that I use works for them, or they might feel it works for them.

Brian: That's exactly what I was trying to allude to that.

David: Okay.

Brian: You use the same language in choir as you do in your lessons? That's possibly a really good way to keep them in choir?

David: Sure, I mean absolutely again, there's enough for them to be thinking about that age rather than lots of different technical approaches. But I have to say, though I don't know if this is the answer you're looking for, I also do think, even at that age, as long as it's being dealt with responsibly and in an informed manner, I like the idea of young

people getting a whole range of technical information. There's no harm, you know, and I would encourage my own students to go and do workshops, work with other conductors, but to listen and to choose what advice they take carefully.

Brian: Brilliant, and the last thing in the section is the idea of mentorship and vocal role models within your choir. So in your youth choir, and in your school choir. Do you have mentor systems kind of you know, where more advanced singers might mentor young boys going through voice change?

David: Yeah, absolutely. It's a thing we have we don't actually have in [named choir], but we definitely have it in in [named school]. It's a lovely age group to be able to apply that, because you know, you have such a massive difference between twelve and eighteen, and never more so than with boys voices, because a twelve-year-old boy in many, many cases, is you know, decades away from an eighteen-year-old boy who's just finished in school. So actually, we have a choir prefect or music prefect roles within the school, and it's exactly what you're describing. It's a sort of mentorship. They're not voice allocated, so sometimes in in years gone by we have two female voices or two female singers. Last year we had one male and one female. So, the male singer, who you know, it ticks all of the boxes we've discussed. I teach him singing. He sings in my choir, and he's an instrumentalist, and everything else as well. He knows from the very start that his role is to A), assist with recruitment, and so to present the choir in a positive light in social circles within the school, and B), to make sure that the new members of the choir, male and female, but by nature of it he'll focus on the on the younger male singers, that they aren't, that they have their music, you know that they that they're not coming in all flustered, not knowing what's going on, because even that, you know, you've probably seen it yourself even, a boy might come to your choir practice not know where to sit and leave and never come in again. So, make sure that there's a welcoming environment, brilliant.

Brian: That makes sense, that the mentor's job is to ensure that all of the basic things that you take for granted and that that knowledge, like all these basic things that we learned over years like how to sit, how to hold your music, how to be a good choir member, that there's people assigned, and you obviously have that in your school.

David: Yeah.

Brian: And so, the final part of the interview in the final part of the interview. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing going? So, to start with, you know what are your thoughts on, broadly in Ireland I suppose, the participation of boys? Like what's good? What are the good things that are happening? What could be better? And I suppose this question is viewing it as a whole ecosystem, you know, starting from primary school to secondary school right up to young people in college who are still going through voice change when they're eighteen, nineteen, twenty. What are your thoughts in general?

David: I think that there's a lot of work to be done. I think that it's not all bad, but I think that it's very obvious that youth choirs and choirs with, you know, voices, as you said, kind of in late adolescence and sort of early adulthood are struggling to find and maintain male voices the stereotypical male voices. It's wonderful to see choirs such as the [named choir], and [named choir] thrive I think you know the choir in the last twenty years in [named choir] has exploded, it's grown exponentially, which is, you know, wonderful to see. But I think it's more important to look in informal and more, let's say, amateur education settings, and look at how singing in schools in general, but the encouragement of boys has as I see it, and it, you know I'm only speaking from my own kind of limited knowledge, has dwindled, has declined. So, I don't have the answers to what can change, but I think that it's really important that people like you and people like Sing Ireland are addressing it, because that has an obvious severe knock on affect them when their voices are changing. From myself, I don't know that I would have sung as a teenager, if I hadn't obviously been singing as a youngster, as you know, before my voice had changed. It's very, do you know what I mean? Like, it's, it's easier for a girl to start singing at sixteen than a boy, I think. Yeah, so that that really early age. Singing in any setting is really important, and I think that what I think is one of the reasons why that has to be addressed now in the last twenty years more so is because church singing doesn't happen anymore. Nobody goes to church anymore, except for the established choirs. There's much less children's choir in churches, so therefore, the responsibility of schools, and you know, organisations that work in schools is you know, so much more great because there's not

that opportunity there to sing informally. And I think that I see I see quite bad teaching sometimes, so I think that there are, and it's not necessarily the teacher's fault. But I think that we, if we're teachers and we're educators, I think that we have to be really careful. I think that we have to you know, think much more carefully about how we nurture young boy voices. And that's even like sometimes it's like, I say, with some boys at thirteen, fourteen, I make it quite clear we're not doing exams. We're not doing competitions, but there's such an onus on getting their next grade that I you know I've examined students who have been very badly advised, and I've been in competitions, I've had students in competitions where I've seen boys sing music that there' absolutely no way that they should be singing it. And the third point of that is, I've sung with men, with professional men who have been taught badly, and now know that they've been taught badly because there's things they can't do that they wish they could do. So that's, that's I think that's almost the most important thing alongside, making sure that encouragement is there.

Brian: Yeah. And knowledge like, how do we get this knowledge to people like in, say, in primary schools like basic knowledge about vocal technique, about repertoire choice about adolescent voice change, you know. So, it's kind of getting that knowledge to them, you know, so they can develop.

David: Yeah. And if we could just add the absolutely all of that, but the knowledge of how to make sure they're included, you know. I'm sure you've observed, I've observed classrooms where the boys at the back and cross their arms, and it's not addressed the knowledge that through music we can make sure that they're enjoying it. It's definitely possible we've all been there.
Brian: Brilliant David, I think, so you have anything else to add at all?

David: I imagine we've probably covered. We've covered everything. Yeah, no, I can't think of anything right now.

Brian: Fantastic. Well, listen, thank you so much. I'm going to end the formal part of this now. So thank you so much for doing this.

David: Pleasure.

Brian: An absolute pleasure to have you.

Appendix H
Interview Transcript – Eoin

Brian: Good afternoon, Eoin, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male adolescent voice change. And, to start with, I'd love to look at your background a little bit and your choral background. Would you be able to tell me maybe a bit about your experiences growing up as a young musician, and maybe a little bit, if you remember it, about your own voice change, and how you felt about you going through voice change yourself?

Eoin: Okay, good to be here Brian. Thanks for the invitation. And yeah, the easy question to begin with then I see! Let's see what I remember. Well going back to my childhood and primary school. First of all, I'll say I went to a primary school which was very nurturing of the arts in general, and maybe music in particular. So, I find myself saying now, with reflection of sort of many years of hindsight, is that that's a very fortunate position to be in first of all, because it nurtures whatever inherent or natural love might be there, whether you're aware of it or not, that's number one. Secondly, I come from a family that is, I suppose, would be described as musical in the sense that a community nothing professional, but in the sense that my dad especially was involved in local musicals, and took lead roles, and loved singing, and sang in the local church choir. And so, from a very young age, I suppose I developed some kind of an, an enjoyment of, and an appreciation of the voice as an instrument, and the power of singing maybe more so as an ensemble member rather than as a soloist, I would say that, you know. And then in [named area] there's a particularly strong [named event] or music festival tradition. So, going back to the primary school reference, we would have been prepared for both choral competitions and participation, as well as individual singing. And in fact, kind of duets and small ensembles as well, I recall so. It was quite a sort of a looking back now, quite an enriching experience for a young. a person who just has an interest in, and some kind of capacity for expressing something through voice.

Brian: Yeah. And do you do you have any memories of going through voice? Change yourself.

Eoin: Well, then, really, the next stage, I suppose I should go on to is that I was then very, very fortunate, through the good offices of my mom especially just identifying that there was an opportunity for boys, in [named school], and a thing called the [named music education programme] in in [named area]. So, I headed off from [named area], to [named area] and the freezing winters to experience there. But the key thing there was an inspirational man called [named teacher], who was just a [named role]. but with a with a, no, I would say a wonderful human being, a musician, and happened to be a [named role]. So, we ended up in in [named area] under his directorship as members of the [named music education programme]. And we were the first year, or I was a member of the first year, and was focused particularly on boys, and was a scheme supported by the hierarchy with the stated aim of providing church trained musicians or liturgically trained musicians. Then, with a view to us, leaving [named school] going on getting degrees and developing our expertise at instrumentally, particularly the organ, but also vocally and chorally through [named teacher] training experience. And that could be a chant, or it could be polyphony, particularly of sacred music. So, it was a really another enriching experience at a young age. Now, going to answer your question, just because of the wide experiences that we were given, and it was a boys only school at the time, we kind of, my recollection is the transition of change in the voice was handled in a very informed way, that where it was appropriate I began as a treble began singing a little bit lower, as an alto part, doubling kind of high tenor, low tenor, baritone range. And it kind of happened seamlessly, so I've no recollection of stopping, or 'you can no longer sing' being said to me. The presumption was always that I could and would contribute, in whatever way, whether that was in a limited capacity, you know, of a of a much-reduced range, with a change sound in my voice, you know, from alto into a sort of a baritone range, or whatever that happened to be. There was no a crunchy gear shift. There was no notion that you, as I say, 'you cannot sing now and take a rest, and let's see how things develop in a few months time or over summer holidays', as sometimes happens with boys changing voices that can be quite dramatic. So no trauma. A continued smooth pathway, whilst I adjusted in terms of what was happening with a changed and changing voice, until it settled a little bit more than in my more senior years. And at that stage, then we were introduced, for example, to the local choral society. So you were moving from chamber music in a boy's school into sort of an adult choral society, exploring typically

choral society repertoire at the time, which was very exciting. And then I remember actually as well attending the Cork International Choir Festival as a member of the [named choir] and that was another whole experience, and opened my ears and expectations to even greater possibilities that I'd heard before then, particularly from Eastern European choirs at the time coming and making the long overland journey to Cork, and hearing choirs from Poland and Czechoslovakia, as it was then, for example, or Estonia just making these incredible noises that my ears wouldn't have heard prior to that, and if you like, giving another injection to that passion for my goodness, what can the voice do? Especially when combined with other voices.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic, and it sounds like in [named school] like, like you were describing that it was kind of a seamless moving across the parts. But obviously that came from really good choral leadership from that inspirational priest who really seemed to know what he was doing?

Eoin: Exactly, without saying anything, without us being aware of anything without us, sort of been instructed that this is happening to you, you know it was, it was just a seamless, subconscious, unconscious pathway. And I now appreciate that was that was due to, as you say, Brian, great knowledge on the part of [named teacher], both musically what's appropriate. What lines are appropriate. How to choose repertoire that doesn't push you into a direction that's a strain, or might be damaging for example, you know. And coincidentally, then later, it's an experience that I did a short study visit to Hungary, and I remember going around primary and post-primary schools, but at the post-primary level, being in classrooms where it was general singing that was going on. But, my goodness, the level of choral excellence that was evident within those classroom settings. But music being presented to boys and girls in the class, but boys in a mixed class setting where it doesn't matter where they were at where the voice was at. And I'm talking about a sort of a transition year, or definitely in classes where voices were changing, but they sang whatever they could sing and understood you know that occasionally they wouldn't be able to continue, or whatever. It was, it was kind of very refreshing to just see that expectation and no surprise from any members of the class if a sort of an awkward sound was coming from some area of the classroom, or I don't know I was. I remember being really taken aback at the confidence of all the young male singers in that setting, of not

being embarrassed in any way about the stage that they were at, and being absolutely confident in their own ability to contribute in whatever way they could. So that that was a that was a great experience. But that happened much later as a as a graduate from college.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. I might move on to the next question, which is about your professional background in coral conducting. And here I'd love to hear about any formal education you did and like in university or college, and ask you in that training, did you receive any training on how to work with adolescent voices? And the other question linked to this is, have you done any informal training that relates to adolescent voices? So, this could be kind of like short courses and things with the ABCD, Sing Ireland, things you've read things you've seen online. So just to say that again, any formal training that you have had that includes information about adolescent changing voices and informal training.

Eoin: Okay? Well, just to put things in context. like, I, obviously, I'm still very active with choirs and choral conducting, and now training as well. But as regards formal training, the very short and concise answer is, no, because it didn't exist when I was going through. Now again to put in context, I'm talking about being an undergrad in [named college] in the [named time period]. This is the context that we're talking about. So, the choral world in Ireland, as I kind of referenced earlier, when I was talking about the experience in Cork, and it was such an ear opener. It was very limited and very stayed, maybe we can say no, and it's a very, very traditional and even arrangements, or Irish composers at the time arranging choral music, it was, it was quite, I would say, formulaic, and it had a particular language, which was okay at the time but even to ears without realising it, somehow, you realise there's not. It was rarely that you came across something that would be really engaging, or really exciting, or really energising, or really saying, 'oh, my goodness, this is brilliant', you know, and that's not to be disrespectful of anybody who was writing at the time, or any arranging that was going on. It was just the musical world, I think, in which we were living at the time, and the fairly narrow understanding that existed, certainly in my experience. So maybe I was coming from again, going back to [named teacher] and [named area]. where we had explored a lot of chant and polyphony in particular. Because going back to the hierarchy thing of us focusing on a training to become cathedral musicians, it was very unique and far seeing at

the time, and it was as a result of Vatican II coming in, and the change to liturgies, and so on, and how music would be incorporated into liturgies. So that was all brand new, and I think we were very fortunate. Well, sorry the hierarchy were fortunate in being guided by the likes of [named teacher] in [named area], for example. Again, that's the link with the Professor [named professor], [named professor]. In [named college], [named professor]. These were all people that we came to know. There was a literature centre in [named area], where we were brought to perform for sort of those who were advising the hierarchy on the success or otherwise of the [named choir]. So, I'm kind of jumping about here, Brian, a little bit. But I'm trying to put in context that our training was kind of haphazard, non-formal, and we kind of continued that into undergraduate study, then in [named college]. We went to [named college] because of the association [named professors] in particular, because organ became for many of us and myself included, our main keyboard instrument. But we were also given access to keyboard skills, namely, piano as well as organ, and then all of us had a, an opportunity to study an orchestral instrument that wasn't keyboard or wasn't voice. So, it was quite a broad foundation in music education. So, in a way, we just continued that experience, or those experiences into college, and did our BMus, and then subsequently a master's. But for in my, in my case there was no choral training involved in that. There was no choral tradition in the university. There is now, I know, a chamber choir, but then there was there was nothing. Any singing we did, was outside of our academic training. And because we were liturgically orientated, still, at that stage, I mean, I would have earned money by either teaching or having a church position. So, I was in [named church] was my first church appointment when I went. But that was as an organist. No expectation of any choral thing. So, all I would do then is, if a choir presented itself, I would accompany them, but I had nothing to do with them. If a cantor was there for a particular service or occasion, I would accompany them again. It was purely my role was organist. I went from there to [named church], and I was fortunate there then, in encountering [named choir], as they were called there, and I remember preparing oratorios with them, because they were again a continuation of the choral tradition that I mentioned that I first experienced in [named area]. But then they would have organised tours to the States, for example, where I would have went. But again, observing choral training going on, or choral direction going on. But my role was as an accompanist, either piano or organ, nothing to do with taking choirs. And then subsequently went on to be invited to take up a position in a brand new

parish, since [named choir] and beautiful new organ was purchased. It was because of a priest who had a bit of a vision about how he wanted again going back to the liturgy, and how he wanted that encouraged. And he wanted someone with a decent, apparently background in liturgical music, i.e., [named school], past pupil or whatever. So, I went out there, and to be very honest. that's where I cut my teeth on choral direction. Choral repertoire, training of voices, understanding how voices came together based on my own singing experience. And, by the way, I should say, after we left [named school], [named teacher] continued, a [named choir] with us, which was really, and we used to do some recitals, you know, in [named church], or in [named area], or in [named area], or whatever, very occasionally. But it was a lovely way to keep engaged with chant and polyphony in particular. It was very narrow in that sense, in terms of the repertoire that we did. But I remember the other, when you mentioned courses, I remember going to Dalgan Park each Easter, several easters in a row, where.

Brian: Well I'm from Navan so I know Dalgan Park very well, I went on walks there for years!

Eoin: Interesting, interesting because I only know it because of music courses, and I mean, I remember Don Jean Claire from Salem monastery coming over, for example. Hans Valde Morosen. I remember people coming down and taking courses in chanting polyphony, and oh my goodness, that was so inspirational because I couldn't even tell you who was responsible for it all, but I mean, whoever was were bringing the absolute best in their fields to work with us. And again, it was [named teacher] encouraging us to attend. And some of us did, some of us didn't kind of thing. But for those of us who maintained an interest in liturgical music in particular, or chant and polyphony in particular, that's, I would still recall knowledge that I picked up there at Easter courses that still feed how I deal with voices or training now! But there was no formal scheme course references on the island of Ireland that I was aware of, apart from the ones that I've just mentioned, and that then led into the Irish Church Music Association, where I was heavily involved. And that kind of was a natural involvement from our experience in [named school] as well. And then, of course, subsequently, I was sort of made aware of ABCD, the Associated British Choral Directors invited to attend. No, not initially, I just attended. But I got into not an inner circle there, but got into knowing some very

influential people and really appreciating it was only a weekend. It's only a weekend course, but, my goodness, they packed so much in.

Brian: What I'm really looking for specifically in this question is training on adolescent working with adolescent boys. Is there any of these courses like the ABCD. Or any of the organisations that you worked with over the years that that gave you any training on how to work with adolescent boys going through voice change?

Eoin: No, I would say again the short answer would be, no. Apart from on the ABCD course, the occasional workshop or lecture focus on dealing with the changing voice, or boys' choirs in particular, and what are the particular difficulties? So, I mean, repertoire would have been discussed, for example, or I suppose, how to deal with someone who's going through a changing voice experience? And do they keep singing? Do they rest up? Do they stop singing altogether? Do you know what I mean?

Brian: So, some things like that? Over the years, a few things like that?

Eoin: Yeah, but nothing, and maybe this is my lack, but there was nothing that I identified that would. It was really being a male singer myself, first of all having an own personal experience. But really, I would go back to [named teacher], and just my own personal experience of how all that was managed. Without really putting too much thought into it. Now, subsequently, I don't know how far you want me to go with this, but I remember my first teaching position was [named school], which was an all-girls school. So that equal voice repertoire was one thing, and we did some lovely things there, and that was that was great. But then I moved to [named area] back to a cathedral position in [named church]. But with that that was in the [named timeframe]. I'm talking about now, but with that came a teaching post as well in [named school], which was an all-boys school. So, I was then in a position for the first time really to be back in sort of a similar position to my own education, where I was in an all-boys school, and there was a music program to develop.

Brian: I might hold you there, as that's going to come up in the next question, if that's ok ,so I can keep them all together.

Eoin: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Sure.

Brian: And that's the next question is about professional practices as a choral conductor working with young adolescent boys. And the first question is about choirs that you have worked past and present that include adolescent boys in them? So, this can be, as you mentioned there, a choir that is fully made up of boys who are of the age going through voice change, or it could be something like a youth choir that could be SATB that has some boys in it going. So even just a very brief overview, an idea of the type of choirs that you've worked with in the past.

Eoin: Okay, I can. I can do that quickly. So, I was beginning to say about [named school] being an all-boys school, and in terms of obviously dealing with boys and junior choirs, and maybe reluctant seniors, especially if there was no tradition of any singing. But what we did is there was a great tradition of musicals in [named school], and it was still in the day, although coming out of it, where boys were expected to take all parts, whether they were juniors or seniors, or whatever. And I remember going back to [named teacher] time, and we never did musicals in [named school], but he used to regale us with, you know, the tradition of musicals in [named school], particularly Gilbert and Sullivan stuff. But anyway, I'll go on to [named school] now, and me as a teacher guiding the boys there. To be honest. I never experienced any great difficulty with getting seniors in. There was just a very good atmosphere in the school, I think, because of the musicals, and them getting on stage and adopting in their more junior years, just been part of that whole musical scene, and then in their senior years, not being afraid to step up and take on roles of changed voices. So, it was all very, It was quite healthy, and we quickly built up, there was a change of curriculum in the [named area] at the time or around my early teaching time, from what was called [named curriculum]. And I saw that was a real opportunity to incorporate voice into the practical element of the exams, which was very, very rare, in fact, probably unheard of in a boy's school prior to that. But it kind of gave me an excuse, I was after numbers in the class, just getting more and more engaged, or as many as engaged as possible. So, there was a real excuse that if the lads were involved in singing in a choir in the school, then they could use an ensemble of just the pieces that we were doing, and sing it as an ensemble then, and that would apply to their academic awards if

you like. So, it wasn't just singing at major concerts or masses, or whatever like that. there was more to it than that. So, it was an attraction to the parents, maybe, as well as the students themselves in terms of using their voices. But key to my experience at that time as well was, I came back to a cathedral position, having left [named church]. So that was a real cutting teeth experience and invaluable. Because again, I'm going to say there was the connection with Cork Choral Festival. We travelled there we performed in the Feis in Dublin. So, I think that I was using competition because I was used to it myself as a student or as a younger pupil, but I used it then as an opportunity to get feedback on what I was doing, because it's hard to think back now. But you do question yourself is, is this right? How do I even blend voices together? How do I choose repertoire that is appropriate? How do I get beyond the notes on the page becoming a real performance experience for those involved in the choir, and a real enjoyable experience for those who have to listen to us? You know so. But to be honest, the regular rehearsals, weekly rehearsals, and then the opportunity, dare I say it, of performance at mass each Sunday was invaluable in terms of my training.

Brian: We'll probably get onto some of those things in a later question.

Eoin: Okay.

Brian: Like the things that you found worked and didn't work. We will get on to all of those later. And then maybe, could you talk about, because obviously you conduct, you know, a very good youth choir.

Eoin: But I'll tell you, Brian, before I get on to that then, a real ear opener for me, and a real experience with boys was when I started the boys choir because I started, and [named church] in [named years], I decided, why don't we have a boys? So, I inherited a very traditional, tired, mixed voice choir in the cathedral, so there was a lot to do there in terms of re-energising it. But one of my best experiences, and you tell me the best context to answer this, but was starting a boy's choir then. So, involving singers from kind of seven or eight to thirteen, you know, to the change. So, it was an equal voice boys' choir. Didn't, didn't sing it was all equal voice repertoire but the lessons that I learned from that were invaluable in [named church] boys, because the biggest thing that it taught me was

first of all enthusiasm from young boys, certainly at that time it was like, coming along to you know, I don't know what a weekly football session, or whatever. There was a real energy about them. Mind you, we incorporated a football break into most rehearsals as well, so that that helped. But the other really invaluable lesson for me was, don't set limitations on what they're capable of doing, because they will always surpass any limitations that you set in terms of the difficulty of the repertoire or the ease of learning, or amazingly, and this is where the liturgical year taught me of an invaluable lesson. If we had done a particular motet or a setting, or something for Easter in one year, to take that out the following year. Memory absolutely secure, twenty-minute rehearsals, and then suddenly you found that they were all singing from memory again, repertoire that you'd done a year earlier. I'm jumping about the place a little bit, but I'm just reflecting on.

Brian: This is all really, obviously crucial stuff. Yeah.

Eoin: Yeah, lessons that that came home to me so. And then their ability to just their ability to perform, to recollect, the standard of musicianship that developed without any real plan on my part. I have to say I just, but the liturgical year gave a structure and a plan that was already there for me, and I didn't realize that until I reflected back on it later that that was an invaluable resource if you like. The liturgical year just that that structure, the fact that we had a rehearsal again, a bit like going back to [named church] that rehearsal. But the performance opportunity then, on the Sunday morning with the warmup beforehand. So, with boys, voices especially, I would argue that there is no substitute for the consistency of that repetition and the opportunity of coming together just to sing together, and the more often you can do that, then the more amazing will be the results that that you will hear.

Brian: Yeah. fantastic. And would you be able to talk a little bit about [named choir], maybe as well, which is a different setting where you have SATB in your in your choir. Could you talk about like, is there any other challenges involved in not like as opposed to having an all-boys choir?

Eoin: Yeah. Okay. Well, first of all, [named choir] came without going into too much detail, but I left the cathedral because I had a change in professional circumstances in

terms of what I did. So, I left the cathedral and [named church] to take up a different role in music in terms of music education in this area in the [named years]. And then, but I wanted to keep contact with the choirs in a practical sense. So, we started what were called the [named choirs] at the time that was supported by the local city council, and that was really because a lot of the boys then who were with me in [named church], wanted to continue singing. It was, it's very often anything that I've done has been driven by the singers themselves, demanding that this be done, or that there's a continued pathway for them. So, we started the [named choir], which was for initially youth choirs when I of post primary age. So, you're twelve to eighteen kind of thing is what you're talking about. And then, as that developed over the few years there was a demand for a younger choir. So, we started a junior choir, as they're called. So now, currently jumping ahead, we now have [named choral music education programme]. So, there's a junior choir which is more or less primary. There's a youth choir which is more or less post primary. And then there's [named choir], the adult mixed voice choir. So boys are involved at an equal voice with the junior choir as an SATB, but also unchanged voices of boys singing soprano and alto in the youth choir. So, you've got that mixture of boys and girls continuing on mainly from our juniors. But sometimes we get new members coming in at youth, and then developing into tenors and basses as well, or baritones, or very often particularly post covid, and this really affected me or affected us badly. The youth choir, [named choir] at the time were at an extremely high level of performance. They'd just come through a sort of a really good cycle of good singers being together, and they a lovely blend of sort of seniors year below, year below. But it all worked very well, and they were doing some very adventurous repertoire. And then Covid hit, and they literally fell off a cliff. I remember we were due to go to a festival. and it was in March, and literally the rope was pulled from under everybody. Then the weekend before this particular festival was taking place, and we didn't get going again. Well, as everybody knows, for another twelve, eighteen, twenty-four months, in some cases. And what I've noticed since then is, there's a real. It's taken a real effort to just get boys going, especially again.

Brian: And I'm going to ask you Eoin to hold that thought because I have a very particular question on that that I think you'll have a lot to say about on later.

Eoin: Okay.

Brian: Okay. The next question I have is, what are the tasks and responsibilities that you have or had when working with young adolescent boys? So, what do you believe as a conductor or a music educator are the tasks and responsibilities for working with young, adolescent boys?

Eoin: Okay, I'm a big, I'm a big believer in engagement first of all. When I was a teacher in [named school], I used to attend conferences or attend meetings with other choral directors, and they used to say, 'we just can't get boys engaged'. It's you know, it's. And I used to look and say I don't know what you're doing, but you know there's no issue. There's no problem. I didn't realise, Brian, to be very honest until I left that situation where basically, I was able, I'm going to say, crack the whip. It was never really like that. But I had the boys. I could meet them in the corridor, I could drag them into the music room. I could say, 'come on, I know you're a good singer, you know, and all the rest of it. 'Come on, what are you doing Thursday afternoon?', or whatever it happened to be. So it was that access to the lads that was really invaluable, and it was only after I left that continued on. Still, I suppose my influence was still there for a few years after I left. But then I started to realise how difficult it is when you're away from that particular environment, how difficult it becomes to attract boys, maybe into a group, and once you have them there to engage them. So, you talked about responsibilities. Engagement is number one. So, they must somehow find an interest in being there, so that they're going to give you their time and trust you with their time. Secondly, it must be a really enjoyable experience. Okay so I would put engagement number one, enjoyability number two, and one feeds off the other obviously. And then a quality experience whatever, going back to my experience with the boys in [named church] don't underestimate what they expect to do, or will be able to do, even though they've no understanding of what you think they might be able to do. Present challenges to them, but your responsibility, my responsibility as a director is absolutely thorough preparation, really careful choice about repertoire, understanding what ranges or what will appeal to the musically, and making sure most of all, that nothing that you do causes any damage to a developing or changing voice. That is the key thing that I have, and really irks me about hearing some repertoire that's, for example, [named festival] that's inappropriate for particular voices, or is

obviously putting a strain on some voices, or that you can hear immediately, and you just wonder what's their experience in in the rehearsal room, you know. And marvel at why they're still there, if it's not such a good experience. So, I think that's a massive responsibility. But I would say I was going to say equally so. Maybe not equally so. But you have to, as choir directors of youth choirs especially, I think we have to be very aware of where the girls are at, where the female voices are at as well, and just what's appropriate for them, and how they change and sort of the great thing about experience, I suppose, well, I tell myself, this at least, is that your ear gets very attuned to, where voices are at individually, and how they will blend together, and then how overall you make that ensemble better than they think they can be themselves or otherwise might be if you didn't have all the experience. At least that's the message I try to give myself, Brian, you know, but I think engagement enjoyment absolutely no damage or making sure that your choices and training ensure the best possible experience for those in front of you.

Brian: Fantastic love it love it, brilliant, brilliant answers there. And the next question I have is, were there any gaps in knowledge in this area in this specific area of the adolescent changing voices of boys? When you arrived at a certain job, for example, the school that you mentioned with all the boys, or when you set up your youth choir, did you feel, were there any gaps in your knowledge that you were like 'oh, I need to go and I really need to read up on this', or 'I need to learn this'. Any kind of specific things with the boys?

Eoin: There have been gaps in so many, so many situations, Brian, I'm going to say. I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to say I arrived in any situation where I had the required knowledge to do the absolute best job possible, and I'd still say that that persists to this day. So how do you deal with that? Well, first of all, there's an understanding of what those gaps are. I think that's really important. Otherwise, you think everything's hunky, dory, and as long as you keep that fresh and keep open to new ideas. I mean, I remember going back to that Hungary education trip, for example, just my jaw didn't stop hitting the ground until several months after I returned from that whole experience and just marvelled that there was one particular primary school teacher, this is a general class of dealing with six or seven year olds, and I can still recollect being absolutely blown away by what she was able to do vocally with those young children. and I remember in her

particular classroom, noticing that there was a dust cloth over the piano, so all she was, she was walking around with her tuning fork. But anyway, that's just still a recollection. So, anyway, trying to answer your question. Yes, there have been gaps, the main training again, maybe I'm showing my age, but it was. It was really the occasional course, or the occasional individual. For example, I remember part of that Hungary course, and subsequently was talking to Christopher Bell and Lucinda Geoghegan, who are absolutely inspirational and people I respect very, very much in terms of Christopher, especially his passion for male voices and changing voices, and what boys can do, and so on. And my early chats with him coincided with my own experience in the cathedral and [named church] boys particularly so. We were kind of discovering things parallel and sharing those thoughts. So, it's discussions like that. Yeah, and I remember.

Brian: And I always have his little book here beside me on the desk.

Eoin: There, you! There you go!

Brian: Because it's a fantastic, very, very small thin book that kind of sums everything up, you know, in a really kind of easy to understand way, you know.

Eoin: Correct. Brian, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And that that has been my reference book over the years, as well, you know, in terms of either giving new insights or reinforcing your my own experience. So, I'm not sure I'm answering the question, though in terms of.

Brian: I think that's enough on that question. I think you've really summarised very well that. By talking to people and reading, you know certain literature, and where you, when you were abroad, like, Yeah, that was really good.

Eoin: I mean, I remember even I mentioned ABCD, but ACDA, I've been to a couple of conferences in America as well. And again, it would be those workshops which are focused on boy's voices or boys' choirs are changing voices where you hear what's being done. You hear, for example, young barbershop courses, which was a real revelation to me about their training as well, and how they bring young male voices into that world of all male barbershop, you know, and again, very cleverly and very, in a real, with a real

musical understanding of how the voices do develop and change, but a lovely pathway through the various voice lines of where is appropriate for changing voices at whatever stage they're at.

Brian: Fantastic. And the next section of the interview is basically about challenges and successes that you've encountered when working with adolescent males? So maybe if you could kind of share a few challenges that you've had over the years to begin with, and these can be musical or non-musical challenges. So, it can be specifically about you know the scores, the music, or it could be about kind of maybe other social, emotional challenges that they may have had. And sorry, to add Eoin, it can also, it can be about like an entire group of boys, or it could be a specific boy that maybe challenged.

Eoin: Okay, those questions sort of triggered quite a few responses in my head immediately. And to be honest, if I were to say, what are the challenges, what are the difficulties they're always to do with more social issues or personal confidence issues rather than vocal issues. There's never, I never think there's a vocal issue to be honest. There's always a place like, as I say, 'all God's creatures got a place in the choir!'. But there's always a place for the voice wherever it's at. That's our responsibility as choir directors, so the main challenges that I see is sort of. For example, I can think of a few cases where guys, before their voices go through a change process have been really good choristers, or really good maybe solo cantors, or whatever in a liturgical setting. And suddenly they find these changes happening, and they kind of know what's coming, but obviously they've no previous experience of it. And there's a real thing to cope with in a liturgical setting I found if suddenly someone was a star for want of a better term, and then they find that they're very limited in how they can contribute, but they want to somehow keep contributing at a really high and important level, and they feel that their significance has been diminished if I could put it in those terms, you know. And I think that's a really difficult or can be a tricky. Again we, as the adults in the room, and the trained professionals, if you like, have a massive responsibility for those kind of lads to make sure that they continue to be engaged because they haven't become a lesser musician, although very often they will think that they have lost a whole skill set that was taken for granted for so many years, in the case of some of them, particularly in a cathedral setup or liturgical setup, as I say. So that and then I'm going back to the

difficulty. I don't want to jump ahead to Covid, if you want to refer to that in particular, but I'm thinking of the difficulty.

Brian: Sorry. Covid would very much apply to this.

Eoin: All right. Okay? Because I'm thinking of the difficulty of getting boys back into that choral, mixed voice, young setting or young, you know, youth choir setting. And I find it a real struggle, and I that has surprised me. It shouldn't have. But it has surprised me because I mean over the past couple of years, I've had a few lads who have joined me. The difficulty was that those vital years where you would have taken them through the change, or they would have continued singing are gone. So, there's no history there. There's nothing there's no reference for them. So there has to be a, a sort of a natural enthusiasm, if they're coming to you with changed voices or changing voices already in train, and they take great encouragement, because their confidence is a bit fragile, and that's what I have found. But that is gradually improving, because we're now just now beginning to get younger [named choir] who have been in [named choir] for the last few years, and their voices are changing, and they know that there's just an expectation that they'll continue singing. And instead of sitting there, they'll sit over there or sit back there, or whatever, and that's fine, and they see that already evidenced by other lads who have been sitting beside them you know, for the Christmas concert. But by the time the summer concert comes, then they're singing a different line. But they're still chummy, and they're still like kicking ball together, or whatever. So I would say yeah, covid was. Covid made a real, a real impact on boys especially, but I would, I would argue girls as well. And not just to do with the changing voice, but with the whole thing of commitment with the thing of not been immediately rewarded, and putting an effort into something that you have to really work at something, and to hear a difference or to be rewarded with a good performance. And so, we're gradually building all of that back up again.

Brian: The idea of a delayed gratification kind of is it yeah?

Eoin: That's so difficult for young minds to comprehend, and for, and that goes for right across the board of their experiences, you know, but music and a good standard of performance . We know as musicians, there's no, there's no shortcut. There's no

substitute for the graft that's involved, or I shouldn't even call it a graft. It's just the application that's more important. And what I said earlier that really came obvious with the boy's choir in the cathedral was just not lengthy rehearsals, but two rehearsals during the week, followed by preparation for mass on a Sunday, followed by a performance opportunity at the mass. I mean, there you already you've got four performance opportunities in a week. So, it's no surprise that the level of performance that those young boys achieved was outstanding, absolutely outstanding. And I haven't been able to replicate that in a lay sense, since, you know. And it's not that the boys are any lesser musicians. It's just that that frequency of engagement has hasn't been there. So great difficulties, and I think we constantly have to review as choir directors and facilitators, particularly of youth choirs, how we accommodate that and make the experience the absolute best it can be, but we have to not be afraid of making demands on the young people, as well.

Brian: That in a way that actually, it's kind of like when the singers are singing really, really high-quality music. they're happier in a way. And by and then by them being happier, they stay in the choir. But in order to make the really high-quality music, you need them to commit to the choir. So, it's really, I understand the dilemma there, you know. Once you have them committed and you have them hooked. then you can you, as a really accomplished musical director, can make them outstanding and get them to perform at a really high level, and then they'll be really happy to stay in the choir. So, it's just, I know. Yeah, yeah.

Eoin: And you've summed it up really well, Brian, there, because you you've described what I said earlier where [named choir] were prior to Covid, and we're nowhere near that still. We haven't, we haven't rediscovered or re-experienced that level. But in a way that doesn't worry me. It's not about, because what I'm comparing is what I was hearing from the young people in front of me. That's not an experience of the current young people who are in front of me, so my responsibility is to give them the best possible experience that they can have at the stage that they're at and keep striving for raising that bar higher and higher. And I'm confident we'll get there. But there's work to do.

Brian: Work to do. And moving on from that, would you be able to talk about a few successes that you've had working with adolescent boys? Or kind of positive moments.

And again, this can be with, you know, a group, you know, the tenors and basses, you know, within one of your choirs, or it could be a specific boy that you maybe worked with, that has gone on to achieve really great things as a singer maybe, or whatever.

Eoin: I mean, yeah, a few incidents or a few specifics sort of spring to mind. Again, I'm going to go back to the youth choir pre covid, because they were the outstanding group of young boys, and then that the fact that they performed to such a good standard then raised the ensemble standard overall, and if you like, the girls matched what they were able to do. So suddenly, we were doing repertoire that in my head they had no right to tackle. I would regard it as more adult [named choir] repertoire. But the fact that they wanted, and this actually happened that several boys in this particular youth choir I'm talking about heard [named choir], the adults, sing particular repertoire and say, we want to do that, and in my own head I would have said you know, 'that's not for them. This is for this particular choir'. And that's, you talk about challenges earlier on. I mean, this is where we have to be careful as choir directors of not categorising too narrowly, or in a way that creates limitations for the group that you happen to be working with. But it's very refreshing for me if their demands outstrip my imagination if you like, if we could put it like that. I applaud that and welcome it, because it shows that there's something else going on. It's not just how well are you singing, it's their understanding of how well they can perform, and their ambition to perform at an even higher level. And then, individually, I've had young male singers who have gone off, and, you know, are performing the West End, mostly actually musical theatre as opposed to sort of the more formal. I've had some past female singers who have been a more formal training. But the few lads that I can think have gone down the more musical theatre or the lighter popular repertoire. And but either is a joy to actually witness or to see or, importantly, a lot of them I would meet, and they're away at college, and they've gone along to their own college choirs and made sure that they're part of whatever the setup is there, sometimes coming back and say, but this is an ego thing to say 'oh, we enjoyed the rehearsal with you kind so much that this isn't what the experience that we're now getting'. But in a way you don't want to hear that you just want to hear that they're using their voices. But that's reflective of me, not of necessarily any training that they would get. It's more going back to that importance of the social cohesion of the group in which they're working, and how well they relate to their other singers, whether that's male or female, or whatever. So, the

instances that I recollect are all really positive ones in terms of seeing, and I know they're going through their growing and maturation process anyway. But somehow, you see that reflected in their voice as well or in their choral contribution, and that's very refreshing, and it's very encouraging for me, as a choir director to witness that. And it helps me to continue, put the energy into young people.

Brian: Fantastic, excellent! Do you mind if I move on to the next section of the interview?

Eoin: Course. Yeah.

Brian: The next one is a very important section, and it's the key qualities of effective conductors working with young adolescent boys. So, kind of what you perceive to be the key things that a choir director really needs to have in order to work with young boys going through voice change. So, to start with what are, in your view the traits or the skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change? So, traits, you know, for me would be kind of like what you're like working with the choir, and skills are kind of specific things that you feel that you need to know in order to work.

Eoin: I think I've touched on some of these already, Brian, you know, in terms of going back to the engagement enjoyment, and no damage, or positive development, so those remain the both the responsibilities, but the traits that personally, I think I need to maintain and be aware of all the time. I would say at this stage the biggest thing that gives me any confidence at all is understanding sound and the quality of sound. I know that's a very broad brush statement, but if I've got something in my ear that I want to hear, or I expect can be delivered from the young people in front of me, or older people in front of me, I mean, I often joke with [named choir] at for our weekend rehearsals I'm jumping here now, it's not directly answering your, but it feeds into it. Like, if we have particular repertoire that we're doing, I have a sound in my head that I expect to hear when they start singing, and as I tell them much of my frustration, or if there is any frustration that's caused by that's not what I heard last night, as I was preparing this rehearsal, you know. So, what do I have to do? What do we have to do to get there? You know, so in a different sense, I'd say exactly the same about the traits and the skills, and so on, that that

are necessary. Understanding, again, I know it's broad brush, but understanding, sound, sound quality. The potential of whatever young people are in front of you to make that sound, or you adjusting to whatever the instruments are in front of you, to create that sound. So, and your skills, then whatever is necessary to cultivate that sound, or even doing a simple little exercise that shows by a different coloured vowel, for example, how that sound can be transformed in a line, or throughout, you know, if just someone here, or a rank here doing this particular shape with their mouth, or shaping a vowel, and you've got a slightly different sound, and, you know, training them to listen to the nuances of that, and how to blend that if that's what you want or how to create that tension in the sound, if that's your intention, but them to open their ears as well as understanding how to use their voice in that context. Those are the things that I strive for, and what makes a rehearsal I think, interesting and enjoyable for all of us involved.

Brian: Fantastic and in terms of like if you had, you know an assistant conductor say, working with you, or an aspiring conductor who wants to work with boys. What, kind of things would you be advising them to do like? What would you advise them to do in terms of their training, or how to learn more about boys, going through voice change?

Eoin: Well, I think I think now specifically about boys, I think that's a hard one. I think I contextualise it more in terms of voice and understanding, voice and understanding sound that I've just said I'd be less focused on specifically, because, to be honest, I have a bit of a difficulty about just narrowing or talking about boys voices all the time. That doesn't rest easily with me, and it could be my own background, and maybe the mistakes that I've made over my own years, or just the experiences that I've outlined earlier.

Brian: So saying, what you're saying, Eoin, is that like, no matter who you're working with, you really need to train all levels of your musicianship to a high level as opposed to kind of focusing just on kind of like 'I treat the boys, you know, in a really specifically different way'. It's really becoming the best conductor you can really, generally, and by doing that you should have the skills to be able to work with whoever?

Eoin: I prefer that description or that that sort of yeah. Going back to actually the classroom that I described in Hungary, in in the general singing class at post primary

level. There was no differentiation. There was no allowance, for there was no, at least in what we could hear and see. There was no exceptionalism in how the young boys, whose voices obviously were changing and weren't necessarily making the most musical sounds, but they understood that themselves, and they understood what, still how valuable their contribution was. And also the limitation of their contribution at that stage. That's what really struck me. They kind of understood through osmosis, or maybe through direction, that we didn't see or hear or witness. They understood how to use their instrument as was available to them at that time to still contribute positively and going back to again the sound world in which they were performing, you know. So, my only experience of all boys has been cathedral choir, and [named school]. My experience since those days have been always in a mixed choir context. So, I suppose in my head, mind you having said that, Brian, I'm going to reference the cathedral boys again, because of the setup there the frequency of rehearsals. That's still, musically, some of the most stunning sounds I've ever heard of any group standing in front of me. Just, I mean they blow your socks off in a in a brilliant way, in terms of my goodness isn't that so beautiful, you know, and so amazing! But, so my experience currently is what I described earlier with [named choir] juniors, boys and girls, but no changing voices, all equal voice. Youth choir changed and changing voices, but all as a unit as an ensemble. Yeah. But having said that, I would find it and do find it invaluable to take out those boys who are either just changing or how are developing a baritone, tenor, bass kind of thing and spend time with them because they really appreciate that time separate. And you can do so much just with them on their own, because you do notice that some will be more comfortable in that environment as well, you know. And they do appreciate that and then will contribute so much better than when they're back in the context of the full choir.

Brian: Great. So, in relation to my question about the advice you'd have for aspiring conductors. So am I right in saying that what you just said there, you'd advise them to hear boys sing by themselves.

Eoin: Yes, one hundred percent.

Brian: Kind of what you're saying there. Yeah?

Eoin: Yeah, one hundred percent. Because.

Brian: Here's a voice. Rather need something on a page.

Eoin: Oh, no, it's but that that's the thing. Always be aware. At least, this is my mantra. Always be aware that you're dealing with instrument or instruments that make a noise. So in in the bluntest sense. So, if you hear, I don't know fifty clarinets all together, that will make a certain sound, you know. But if you just ask a clarinet to perform, or you take that clarinet into the room, exactly the same. I talk to young singers in particular about unpacking their instrument as they come into the room, or when they come into the room, you know. So, you can't slouch. You must have an attitude in terms of appreciating that this is your instrument that you're presenting for yourself first of all, but to the rest of the group. So, what do you have to do to make that instrument sound as well as it possibly can. And that's where the one-to-one conversations or the one to small group conversations can make a difference. So if I was having someone observing me in in oral rehearsal or choir rehearsal, I would, I would have that kind of a conversation and encourage them if they're dealing with choirs to do exactly the same. And to see, does that make any difference? And I will guarantee it will make a difference. It'll make a difference to their ears, and it'll make a difference to the relationship that they have with the singers, and therefore it'll make a difference to the quality of the ensemble performance when all the elements are brought back together again.

Brian: Fantastic. I have a few kind of short, quickfire questions. Feel free to just give a few sentences for each of these answers. I just want to figure out how you approach the following aspects of the job in relation to these things I'm going to ask you. So, the first one is repertoire selection, and in terms of choosing repertoire for choirs that involve adolescent boys going through voice change, what are the kind of things you're looking for in a piece of music that will maybe make them shine or sparkle as singers?

Eoin: Right. I'm going to sound like a broken record here, but I'm going to go back to engagement enjoyment, and treating the instrument as according to where it's at. So, repertoire has to do all of those things for me. Sometimes it will be a reflective piece, sometimes it will be an energised piece. Sometimes it will involve, young people love

movement, or some kind of physical engagement, as well as well as I am going to say, just using their voice. But I'm using that term, you know, in the context of what we're talking about here. I think choir directors have a massive responsibility to listen to so much music or source so much music before selecting what's suitable for their particular group. And I've had pieces which work with some groups, and then I go to another group, and it hasn't worked. You know, It's not the piece that changes. It's the personality of the singers or the ensemble that changes. So that's a really important exercise for conductors or choir directors to go through. And that's very time consuming. And I think the more experienced you get at that you can sort of recognise on the page what will or will not work with the particular group of singers that you're talking about. But it's not necessary to say like it has to be, you know, pop, based, or, you know, in a popular genre or lots of energy all the time. In fact, I find the opposite to be the case, that sometimes young people are always affected by something that's composed, that has a genuinely soulful reference or an emotional connection, and then they produce extraordinary things as a result of that engagement, you know. So, it's, I think it's important role to give them a real variety in terms of vocal expression, but also emotional expression that allows them to explore areas that aren't just of a particular genre, particular level, or whatever it's all part of their personal development

Brian: That's really interesting. I know some people say that kind of with boys, they all have to be kind of upbeat kind of pieces of music, but what you're saying, and a lot of people in these interviews have said is that the actual mixture is really important, and that actually, boys and a lot of a lot of times, the boys really like the emotional ones just as much as the as the lively ones. But it's really about how it's presented and how it's taught.

Eoin: Yeah, completely. And I found that how do I would have put it like I I'm hearing now, I'm seeing incidences of. or occasions where no, not to over egg it, but where? Where the obvious emotion of a piece that has been performed has been reflected in how the boys perform, or look, or respond or comment to you afterwards, you know. So, I think we're failing in our job, if we, if it's, I certainly would never consider just upbeat, you know, or up tempo, or sort of a physical expression, you know, in terms of the repertoire it has to be. It has to be more than that, because they are more than that.

Brian: Yeah. The next question I have is about assigning appropriate voice parts. So just briefly, what do you do when you have a boy going through voice, change in terms of the voice parts in your choir? So, if you have a boy soprano, yeah, what do you do with them in terms of the SATB, perhaps in your choir.

Eoin: Okay that immediately know the instrument that you're dealing with. Know, know the voice that you're talking about, or talking to, and some repertoire and know the music. So, if you know the instrument and know the music, you're in a position then to match one with the other. And in changing voices, that actually will vary. I've no difficulty varying the responsibility of the boy or the individual to choose this line here, or to sing that line there. That happens quite regularly, you know, so there's no such thing as you are a low alto, or you are tenor one and it will be ever thus, or do you know what I mean? Or sometimes you know, as you know, with changing voices, there can be a big drop, so that their lower register suddenly has a bit of focus, has a bit of strength to it, and sort of a middle or an upper register isn't there yet. So, you have to be careful, even in terms of, in some cases I'm thinking, back to, this is the passage that's best suited to you here. But don't continue on this line here. So, there's been that sort of jig sawing, that's what I would call it again. You will only be able to do that by knowing the instrument and knowing the music.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. And one question that I think you've kind of answered already. But if there's anything you want to add to, it is the idea of retention of young male singers in the choir. and some of the issues, and some of the things you might do to retain them in the choir?

Eoin: Yeah. Okay. Again, what I find again, particularly post covid. And we're still learning these lessons. That's and if I were to give you an answer, pre covid, I would say I haven't experienced any difficulties. I'd be very glib about it. I think that world has changed, and I know that world has changed. So now we have to ensure, here we go again, engagement, enjoyment and quality experience, you know.

Brian: If it is the answer for every one of them, then there's something about it, isn't there?

Eoin: I kind of think it is Brian to be honest, and I also think that that social cohesion that I talked about earlier, and being very conscious of the individual as opposed to the group. I think we have to invest time in that to be the most successful group you have to know the individuals, and then how best they blend. And I'm not just talking about vocal blend, I'm talking more actually about social blend and cohesion, and so on. So that's my answer to that. It's, but in some cases, and I've had boys whose voices are actually have been good and settled in the sense of where they're at the time, and for whatever reason, they just felt still a bit uneasy within the context of the ensemble. So, awareness of that on my or our part, and then just how to deal with that, to ensure that engagement and enjoyment. That's where I'm at.

Brian: And the last question in this section is the idea of mentorship within your choirs in terms of vocal, having vocal role models in your in your choirs, but also role models who are more general, you know. Yeah. do you use any kind of role model systems in your choir where maybe the older singers might have a mentorship role to bring?

Eoin: I, I would say I would say not enough, and not in a in a properly structured way. And that's something that sometimes we make an effort at, but not in a consistent way. So that's a that's a shortcoming actually, because I think the role of peer mentoring is absolutely vital, and I think, again referencing post covid, I think, becoming more important because the respect. The thing about an ensemble is that the young people themselves will recognise very quickly who's the more dare I say it naturally gifted, or who is a sweeter instrument. They will recognise that, or you know, if I mean, I think of incidents where one of my basses, for example, he hadn't a great range, but he had a brilliant low, like he had a really resonant low G, F, E, you know. He had no right to be down there and in terms of but it was amazing the effect. If we had a particular piece where, you know, he might necessarily have done much, or you wouldn't think that he had done much during the piece, but if there was a, you know, finishing on a on a low F or an F chord, or something like that, and his job was to sing that F at the end. Well, then, it was worth he felt it was worth them being there for that one time. So anyway, I'm sort

of jumping about a bit a little bit here. But what I'm saying is, there's an appreciation, an inherent and natural appreciation within the group of, for others within the group. And but it's our job to cultivate that as well, but in a in a way, it's quite natural. So, I'm going to say that I think I and my choirs or we, whoever's working with them probably fall short in terms of that peer mentoring role. But I do appreciate the importance of it, and I would venture to say the increasing importance of it.

Brian: Yeah. fantastic. And so, the last section of the interview basically is about your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland in general? So, we're kind of moving away from your specific choirs that you work with, and we're looking at the broader situation of boys singing in Ireland. And to start with, like, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland? And perhaps maybe talk a little bit about what's working and what's not working, in your opinion.

Eoin: Well, I suppose in my experience, or you know I'm referring to maybe visits to likes of the [named festival] or [named festival] and seeing what's presented particularly, it's that's post primary school age is what we're focusing on now. So, there's an obvious discrepancy between the amount of females that are going to stand on the stage as opposed to the amount of male or young boys singers. And we kind of observe in a very positive way, if boys present themselves either in the context of an all-boys school or in the context of boys being part of a mixed, a mixed choir setup. But I mean, I can recall too many incidents where you'd have forty girls, and you'd have three boys in the middle of them kind of thing, you know. So, I think that's actually a fair reflection of what presents itself currently.

Brian: Yeah.

Eoin: And if that's the case, then something's wrong somewhere in terms of that engagement, engagement and enjoyment that I talked about earlier, you know. I remember one local school actually had a problem similar. It was a mixed, it was co-ed school. And one year the choir director got really frustrated, and he decided that he kind of made a rule. I'm not sure how he managed this, but I know it happened in effect. Basically, he got, it was a rugby school. He got basically the senior team to all come

along and engage in a musical and be the chorus for the musical. And they all got engaged in the musical first of all, and then he managed to continue with the majority of those in his senior school choir then afterwards. And he said, I'm not sure how it happened afterwards that but for that single year at least, and for the year afterwards, I think he managed to have a really strong senior boy representation in the choir. Otherwise, I mean my experience of looking at [named festival] is that the girls are, I mean the all-girls choirs are really strong, and sing some of them to an extraordinarily high level. And for mixed choirs that's a more difficult challenge, and repertoire has to be chosen really, really, carefully. And in fact. I would say that because of the limitations and the difficulties of dealing with changing voices, the repertoire tends to be more stayed, less adventurous, less exciting, less engaging. So that's an issue that I think goes back to the choir directors or the teachers themselves. I mean, I applaud the efforts that are made, but I think real support is needed in terms of looking at that repertoire. I mean, and there's some excellent SAB repertoire, for example, that's available now, either original pieces or great arrangements, and I think that should be explored far more than it is, as opposed to SATB for lots of settings.

Brian: And, broadly speaking, in Ireland, just to finish off the interview, Is there anything else that you'd like to see change in relation to, how, you know adolescent boys are dealt with in the choral situation? You know what's working, what's not working, what could be done?

Eoin: Yeah, well, generally, first of all, I think, Sing Ireland are doing extraordinarily positive things in terms of opening the whole discussion around, what singing and choral singing is all about in the broadest possible sense. So that's to be applauded. [Named music festival] provide a useful platform, I think. Or youth choirs or post primary choirs, either competitively or non-competitively, which is important as well. And then, I think you know, in the broader sense, the whole notion of training, and who trains the trainers? What experience do they have? What's in place to ensure that those dealing with young voices at a very formative age are well enough equipped to actually provide the best experience to the young voices in front of them. Going back again, Brian, to the engagement, and if you get them engaged and you give them enjoyment, then, those are the two key elements, I think, to help give that experience, or those experiences which are

going to be rewarding for the individuals contribute to an overall great ensemble, and really lead to personal growth as well as musical growth, in the young people that you're dealing with.

Brian: Fantastic. Will we finish up there, Eoin, will we?

Eoin: Okay, I'm so I hope I didn't ramble on, or sort of.

Brian: No, that was really enjoyable. I enjoyed every second of that. Thanks so much. I'm going to end the formal part here.

Eoin: Okay.

Appendix I
Interview Transcript – Fiona

Brian: Okay, good afternoon, Fiona, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on the male adolescent changing voice. So, to start with, I'd like to hear a little bit about your own choral experience growing up, and your own experience of your voice developing from when you were a small child, right up until you were a fully grown adult.

Fiona: Okay. So, I started singing in a church choir when I was very young. But my first, like real choir experience, was in my secondary school choir. And I sang first soprano there, and I continued to sing first soprano through in college choirs, and also in like [named choir] and things like that. And I think, I don't know if I was fully aware that my voice was developing at any point during that. So even though some of the top notes would have gotten harder to sing as I went along, I just continued to sing first soprano. And definitely as a female wouldn't have thought of my voice as changing in that sense.

Brian: Great and in terms of your professional background in choral conducting, would you be able to talk a little bit about how your formal training as a conductor taught you about the male adolescent, changing voice. So, was there anything in your formal training that gave you insights on how to work with the adolescent changing voice?

Fiona: So, I learned to conduct in terms of formal education through my undergraduate degree, which was [a named music degree]. And nothing on any of the modules there would have related to specifically to even youth choirs, but certainly not male adolescent voices or young boys' voices. During my master's degree in choral conducting performance, again, nothing related to male, adolescent changing voices. There was no conversation about, actually about vocal pedagogy or the development of voices at all. So, I would say that the majority of what I learned was actually through experiences I had, professional experiences I would have had. And I first became aware of this idea of like the cambiata choir, or the changing voice choir through my work with the [a national level youth choir]. When they had specifically cambiata choirs or experiences I can't

exactly remember, but I started to notice that this was a phenomenon. Now, having not gone through it myself, I knew that at one point, men spoke lower than boys who spoke high, but in terms of it connecting that to my vocal practice, that was nothing that I was prepared to do, or prepared to deal with, and definitely not prepared to support and make into a positive experience for the young people. So, I suppose, I worked initially with children's choirs, and though it was a professional experience, I do think it was actually it could be classed as professional development because I worked primarily with somebody who was very much into the music education of young people. But with that choir, our young people actually had to finish once their voices started to change. So, I didn't even see it in that context. So, I was very confident, dealing with upper voice choirs very confident, with mixed voice choirs. But really, what happened in between never entered my mind until I actually had to deal with that in a professional context.

Brian: Okay, okay, thanks very much for that. And in terms of, is there any other training that you've done in relation to the adolescent changing voice? Or any literature that you've read, or books or short courses that you've done, that relate specifically to the changing voice?

Fiona: So more recently, I've gotten very interested in this phenomenon in the organisation that I run. It is a priority for us, and it will continue to be a priority for us to support and develop young people whose voices are changing and specifically young boys whose voices are changing. But in terms of how I've learned to do that it has very much been self-directed. I have become aware of writers, particularly from the UK, in that I'm aware of who have really brought this field on. And so, I have engaged with some of their work. I've also tried to make myself aware of some of the good pockets of practice where this happens. But in terms of literally attending a course that would deal with this topic, no, I have not found there to be one on offer. And particularly not one that would speak to my context, so the Irish context. There are some in the UK, particularly the ABCD, The Association of British Choral Directors, that I think I may have popped into a zoom at one point about that, and I think on one conference I was on, there was some research being conducted, and I think that was the Society for Musicology in Ireland. At one point I heard a talk related to it, but beyond that I've not actually been on a course dedicated to this topic, which I feel would be beneficial of course.

Brian: Brilliant, brilliant. So, I'm going to move on to the next section in the interview, which is about professional practices, and the first thing I'd like to ask you is, what choirs have you worked with, past and present that involve the adolescent, changing voice? That involve boys that are going through voice change. So, this can be choirs entirely made up of boys, or it could be an SATB choir that has adolescent boys in it.

Fiona: So, I've quite a lot of choral experience, engaging with young boys. So currently, I run an organisation that has young people from ages [named age range]. And so, of course, we have a number of young boys whose voices are changing as part of that. And there are many different choirs within that which allows us to cater to an extent for these young voices, and sometimes I work directly with them, or sometimes other members of the team work with them. But ultimately that is a kind of a professional environment in which I'm in. I also am the artistic director of another organisation that, similarly, is an incremental structure of choral music education. And again, there are young boys throughout the programme that we have to support and how we move them from being trebles, all the way to hopefully engaging as young tenors and basses. I also work in a national organisation where young people are my priority, specifically under the age of [named age range of the named youth choir]. And so there, obviously, that's a really important time for boys and changing voices. So, they would be the main, the main choirs that I'm currently working with that would deal with young people who may be going through voice change. And so, there's many choirs within that, but they're the main contexts.

Brian: So, in terms of your tasks and responsibilities when working with these singers, what? What do you consider your tasks and responsibilities?

Fiona: So, this is interesting, because what my actual tasks and responsibilities are in some ways different to what I take as my tasks and responsibilities. So, like ultimately, the job is to conduct these young people in singing these pieces. But, I'm also very much aware that there are big challenges for, for young boys going through this, this change. So, I mean, I suppose if I can group the tasks and responsibilities together, I would say that there are music education tasks and responsibilities in terms of generally developing

their musicianship and their musical understanding. That's not specific to boys changing voices right? That's just the children in general. But there are vocal considerations that we have to be careful, physiological considerations that we have to be mindful of, as the boys are changing, and their voices are changing. Social considerations, so you know, how are we supporting them? And emotional considerations? They're going through a big change at a time. Now, the girls are, too, but you know, we know that it looks different for the boys. It looks different for every boy, but it certainly looks different for boys going through voice change. So, I suppose they're the areas that I would take as my tasks and responsibilities. I have to make sure that the repertoire that I'm choosing takes them into account. And the thing is you don't, like I could just programme repertoire that I want to perform. And this is what I mean is that you know, in many job descriptions it doesn't lay out specifically that you have to take these considerations into account. But I think it's really important that we, as choral conductors, do. So, choosing repertoire. Even planning rehearsals in a way that adheres to the kinds of energy that we that we would see in boys. And like it's a big, it's kind of a stereotype as well, and not every boy is like that. Not every girl is like that. But I think you do find that the boys really enjoy the physicality of a rehearsal, the moving around, getting up out of their seats. You know again, not every boy, but I do find that they find it a little bit harder to sit down on a seat, and concentrate for a longer amount of time. So, making sure that the rehearsal structure adheres to them. That's another responsibility that, you know, is for every conductor. One thing, I think, is important as a task and responsibility, but that maybe I could do more of, is the communication of the experience to the boys and the parents. Because what I know they may not know, and they might think it's strange that they're going through this, but even facilitating like a social part of the rehearsal where they can actually talk about this experience. That probably should be a responsibility that maybe I haven't taken as one. Because again, it's not outlined specifically in any job descriptions. And so yeah, taking responsibility for all of that and for the development of them as good people. I think that's important in choir. We stand to make a big impact on how they see the world. And so again, that's not specific to boys changing voices. But I think it definitely includes them, boys whose voices are changing.

Brian: Great, fantastic. And the next thing I want to ask about is so obviously every organisation that you work with is going to be different, and have a slightly different

approach to working with adolescent boys. But when you went into some of these organisations, did you find you had any gaps in your knowledge that you had to fill in? And what did you have to know? What did you have to learn when you started with these organizations in order to fill in the gaps with how to work with adolescent boys in that context?

Fiona: Well, fundamentally, I knew nothing going in about boys changing voices. So, everything that, I've had to learn everything while on the job. And so, you're always trying to catch up with the situation. So, everything I know now about changing voices has come following my appointment or following my founding of my organisation. I really had no idea about the complexity of all of this, and things that I've really had to spend time learning about is where to place the boys in the choir, and it's not a clear-cut answer. You can know where their voices are sitting in terms of the range, the tessitura, but you also have to take into account how might it feel for that young boy to sit in the alto section when he's the only boy. And sometimes you have to make these decisions, is it worth moving him into tenors early in the knowledge that he actually can't sing a lot of those notes? But actually, from a socio-emotional point of view or social emotional consideration, it's more important for his identity that he's sitting beside his friends. Do you move him into a different choir? Like all of these things to an extent, they have to be learned in real life, but having some knowledge, at least about classifications of voices, would have been super helpful going in. What kinds of repertoire? I think the biggest learning for me was about the restricted range. I had no idea just how restricted a range could be for young people, for young boys before it. Because, having not gone through this myself before I started, I couldn't have predicted that some of them literally have a third for a period of time. And so how do you support that? And it's all about compromise, isn't it? And I think, though yes, some of that can be learned in advance, and some of it you have to learn on the job. But yeah, fundamentally, I knew nothing when I started.

Brian: Brilliant thanks. Thanks so much for that. And so, I'd like to move on to the next section of the interview, which is about challenges and successes that you've had working with adolescent boys going through voice change. So, the first thing I'd like to ask you is, can you describe some challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent

male singers going through voice change? So, these can be musical challenges or non-musical challenges.

Fiona: Okay, well, I think the biggest challenge is how to keep them engaged, the boys, and how to compete with sport. I think that's a huge challenge. And how to make sure that they feel like it is for them, in a world that is in many, on many occasions telling them that choirs is not cool for young boys. So, I think that's a huge challenge with what we're doing, how to ensure that there are, there are enough of them that they stay, because as you lose boys, you lose more boys, and it kind of it snowballs. And so how do you keep enough of them for them to feel like they want to be there, and they have that social outlet. I think another challenge is how to, how to engage with them when you're actually not the expert, because no matter how much I know or learn like, I've not had that lived experience of going through the kind of change that they've gone through. And how can I find people or bring people to them that can empathise a little bit better with them, would be another challenge. I mean, I think the whole thing is a challenge. I think, as an area, it's possibly the most challenging thing for youth choral conductors right now. And I think there's just a complete lack of understanding, lack of CPD opportunities, lack of awareness, and like, I don't even think we know what we don't know as choral conductors yet. So, I think, yeah, I think this whole area is just a challenge. But there are like, there are amazing experiences that my boys have had, as well.

Brian: And that's great. And I wonder would you be able to share me some positive moments that you've had in your choirs while working with adolescent singers? So, success moments or moments of growth that you've come across when working with boys going through voice change, or in that age and when they're developing their voice.

Fiona: So my first chamber choir, youth chamber choir that I set up was back in [named year], and we had a cohort of young tenors and basses, and they were quite young at that time, and I think just generally what they achieved, as young singers really showed me what we could do, and how much they want to be pushed, and what experiences you can you can offer them. And I would imagine, like a lot of their voices weren't settled now, knowing what I know. I know that their voices weren't settled at the time, and yet we have the flexibility within the choir to be able to help them. But the choir had enough

structure that it kind of encouraged them to create something excellent. And I think that particular cohort of young people is possibly one of my biggest successes, and they went on to achieve incredible things as a choir, and many of them have gone on to achieve incredible things beyond the choir. And one particular thing I loved was bringing three of our tenors and basses up to a national choir, another national choir to help out the tenors and basses up there, and just seeing them go up with all that confidence in their own voices, because of the nurturing we had given to them within my organisation, and they just absolutely thrived in that environment with other young people which really hammers home the importance of the social side of these choirs, and how they're not just about having them sing the right notes at any right time. That social part is absolutely huge, and the opportunities they can have through these choirs. And then, you know, with our younger singers, when I now see them in my youth choir as tenors and basses, and I met them, maybe when they were seven or eight years old, as genuine trebles, like babies, and now they've stuck with us for whatever seven, eight years. And now there are new generation of tenors and basses. I mean, like, that is just the most incredible thing to be able to grow your own population of the next generation of young male singers. Because, somebody has to do it. And if we want choirs to thrive, and we want adult choirs in Ireland, somebody has to take responsibility for keeping young boys singing and navigating their changing voice, and then becoming confident with their changing voice. So my biggest success is seeing these young people populate my youth choirs. And hopefully, if you talk to me in ten years we'll see those go on to maybe professional or high level amateur adult choristers, to be to be adult choristers, which would be a huge achievement of my programme. And hopefully, there'll be lots of them.

Brian: Great. And is there any other challenges or successes that you can think about before we move on?

Fiona: I mean, it's all. It's all a challenge!

Brian: Great. Okay, let's move on to the next section of the interview. And in this section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers? And to start with, what, in your view, are

the traits and the skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change?

Fiona: What are the? Say it again? What are the?

Brian: Traits of being a good conductor, and skills of being a good conductor?

Fiona: Thanks. In some ways they don't differ from general 'what is a good conductor'. I mean for me, it's being able to balance musical excellence, and your own musical excellence, so that you are the best prepared conductor you can be, with that real understanding of the social responsibility that you hold. So, how you negotiate those two things for me is what can make a great conductor. So, somebody who can demand excellence, while respecting the humanity of the people who are in front of you. So that's, none of that specific to the boys changing voice. I think, what is helpful for boys whose voices are changing, is somebody who can either draw on their own experience, or who has worked to consider how challenging that experience might be for them, and who can put things in place to support the young boys. But fundamentally, we have to be the best musicians we can be because the young people deserve to work with the best, and to be nurtured by the best. So that's not specific to changing voices. But in that context to be the best means that you have a thorough understanding of the challenges and the possibilities that come with young people whose voices are changing. So, somebody who's done their work to both know intellectually what's going to happen. Who has some physical empathy or physical understanding of the change. Somebody who you know has the research read, who's aware of the emerging themes in the research, and what the current thinking is. Somebody who thinks critically about their own practice, and who always is considering what harm they might be doing to a changing voice and works against that. But I mean they're just general good conducting things as well.

Brian: And what advice would you have for new or aspiring conductors in this field? So, if you were working with someone who was given a changing voice choir or a choir with adolescent changing voices in it. What advice would you give to a new conductor starting out in the field?

Fiona: To take the responsibility very seriously because it is a huge responsibility to take care of these young people and their changing voices. And in a choral context, I don't know if there's anything more important than taking care of our youngest singers. Their voices, but also their well-being at the same time. And giving them opportunities to excel. So my advice would be to prepare as much as possible, to learn as much as possible, to go and talk to people who've done this for years because there are people who, even if they don't fully know what they're doing or why they're doing it, their practice has proven to be very positive and very helpful for young people. So, to go and spend time in their rehearsal room and try and understand what is it that makes them so brilliant with these young people? And what can I do? And to think about what kind of approach that you yourself want to have and really make your mind up, but do as much as that before you get in front of the young people. So that any experimentation you're doing with them has some element of backing. You know, some element of training.

Brian: Brilliant, fantastic. So, in the next section within this section, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the aspects of work. Sorry, I'll say that again in the next section. I would like to ask you a few questions about the job of working with young people, and the first thing is about repertoire selection. So how do you approach repertoire selection when you're working with a group that contains adolescent boys?

Fiona: So repertoire selection, and the placement of voices kind of goes hand in hand for me, because I have to understand who is going to be in my choir at a high level, who's going to be in the choir in order to pick the repertoire. And so, for example, if we've got lots of trebles and lots of lower voices that's going to impact on me, maybe picking you know soprano, tenor, bass repertoire. So, it is important for me to know who is going to be in the choir to do that, while also programming flexibly enough, for inevitably, when voices start to change throughout the year that either the repertoire can pivot or the young people can move across sections. I think when I'm programming SATB repertoire for that young age group, I do make sure that the B, the bass line isn't going particularly low. And I try not to let it go beyond kind of the low a, because I want them to have a very rich sound and a rich sounding bass part. And also, you know, I try not to have too many splits in the lower voices, because just to give them the confidence of having a full section around them. So yeah, it's very specific to the context.

Brian: Great, and in terms of retention of young male singers within the choir. Do you have any tips or any kind of ideas on good practice in terms of retaining the young adolescent boys within the choral context?

Fiona: I think facilitating friendships within the choirs is probably the best way that I know how to get singers to keep coming back. Because as much as I like to believe they're coming back for me and the music, I really fundamentally think they're coming back to hang out with their friends spend time with their friends. And the music is important, but I think if all they're doing is coming in singing and leaving, I would imagine I would hold on to fewer than if I always give them breaks and time to chat and time to connect and time to do performances where actually they're sitting around between the rehearsal and the performance, and they're chatting away, and they're getting to know each other. So I think the social aspect is really important.

Brian: Brilliant and in terms of teaching young males vocal technique and vocal anatomy, and with vocal anatomy, I'm going to also talk about like the whole body and the use of the body and singing. How do you approach teaching that to young, adolescent boys?

Fiona: So teaching actual vocal anatomy in detail is not something that I do, and I firmly believe that we leave the experts to do their thing. And so my preference is always to have somebody who's an expert in that area, or in any area to come in and work on that particular thing, because in that way the young people are always getting the best person, and they're always getting access to the highest quality of information, because we really don't want to do harm. And if we ourselves aren't, if we don't have the lens of a vocal scientist, then, I mean, I could do a certain level of a job of explaining. But actually I do stand to do some harm or to bring, you know, misinformation, even if not intentionally. So, I think my preference for those kind of areas is to bring in a specialist. Now, of course, I do embodied work with the singers, and I would hope that that helps them have some level of understanding, but I certainly wouldn't call myself a vocal practitioner who would be confident teaching vocal anatomy.

Brian: And in terms of the idea of mentorship, and the idea of having vocal role models in the choir for the young adolescent boys. What's your view on that? And do you use vocal models? And do you have leaders within your different sections to inspire the younger singers?

Fiona: Well, it's very helpful in an incremental programme of music education, because there's always somebody that is further along in the journey than you as a chorister. So, there's always somebody in the next choir or in the next year group in school. So, what I find very helpful is to bring back the older singers to work as choir mentors. So maybe sing in a section, so sit in the tenors and sing with them for the term. And that way, they're also gaining leadership experiences, and the young people are benefiting from them. If we have particular singers who demonstrate very high levels of musicianship and competence, then I'm absolutely open to having them facilitate sectionals. But again, it has to be, they have to be good enough to work with the young people. And so, there is a level that I would need them to reach in order to give them that level of responsibility. But I think mentorship in my programs is fundamental, whether they're going back as a music assistant to the junior choirs, or they are acting as section leaders for the slightly older choirs. I think it's fundamental. I think you know, having somebody who's gone through the experience very recently helps because the world is changing, and even how you or I would have experienced voice change fifteen to twenty years ago would be very different to now I can imagine. The world is a completely different place. You know, social media is huge now, none of that existed when I was of an age where my voice was likely changing. So, I think, having role models similar in age to them helps. And I think having conductors and choral leaders who have gone through voice change. So usually, male conductors actually have a really important place in youth choir programmes. And not to say that they have to be the conductors. But I think their presence is very important, not only vocally and musically, but also just socially and on a human level, for our young boys.

Brian: Great, fantastic. So, I'd now like to move on to the final section of the interview. And in this section I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing going? So,

to start with, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland at the moment.

Fiona: I think, post covid, the situation is not as positive as it would have been before covid. I see a dwindling in numbers at every level in terms of boys singing, and I also don't see a big push at a high level to change that, though there are phenomenal people on the ground doing amazing work. Where's the support for them? And where is our kind of national commitment to regenerating a community or a society of boys who sing? That's what's missing for me. And so yeah, participation, I think we can change it. I think my organisations are well positioned to change that. And I think we just have to make it a strategic priority, and we can do it. But you're fighting some serious cultural norms that don't have boys singing as a particularly prevalent and situation right now. So I think it's not that it's hopeless, but I wouldn't say I'm hopeful right now at a at a high level.

Brian: Yeah. And I suppose to finish up on this topic. Like, what are your final thoughts on youth choral music in Ireland? How it relates to boys singing, what do you find is really working, and what's not working at the moment?

Fiona: Well, I think people are working people. Conductors are working really hard, often for no money, with no structures in place with a real de-professionalisation of the profession. We have some of the most incredibly trained, skilled, educated people who are willing to, and really want to contribute to youth choral music in Ireland, and that's a hugely incredible resource. But it's an underutilised resource. And also, goodwill can only go so far. So the structural support would need to be there for anything like this to thrive. And it's you know, it's about having respect for the people who've grafted for the people who have put in the work who have. Even though we don't have that many young people singing at national level, you know the people who got them there, the conductors from the regions and from the schools who got them there. The question is, how can they be harnessed? And they're not being harnessed right now? And I think it's really important that they would be, because actually, we have a wealth of knowledge. I also think maybe it's an opportunity, or maybe I don't know, but I think there is so little done on boys singing in Ireland, that actually anything like this research project, for example, stands to make a big impact. And I think because we're not trying to battle with structures

that already exist. Actually, we could set up the practice of boys singing in a really research informed way from the get-go. So that everything that we do doesn't have to be redone later on. But we just start off in a way that is really considered really clever and unified as an approach kind of nationally, and that also looks to international examples. And that really understands the complexity of the issue because it's not a simple issue. And if we oversimplify it, I don't think we stand to make any real progress in the area.

Brian: Great any closing things to say, Fiona, before we wrap this up?

Fiona: Nope, I think that's good. Thank you.

Brian: Well, thank you so much for your time and insights. Today, your input is really appreciated and will be really helpful for my research. So that concludes the interview part of our discussion today.

Fiona: Thanks, bye.

Appendix J
Interview Transcript – Geraldine

Brian: So good afternoon, Geraldine, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male, adolescent voice change. And the first section I'd like to talk about is your background and your own choral experience as a singer and your experience of your voice changing, you know, from your children's voice, to your teenager's voice, to your adult voice, etc.

Geraldine: Okay? Well, I sang in choirs as an adult for a long time myself. Back in [named year], I think it was, I was teaching music in a primary school in [named area], teaching piano. And the principal asked me would I be interested in starting a school in choir. So, I thought to myself, yeah, this sounds interesting. My own experience up to that had just been as a member of a choir as such. So, I actually met a lady called [named teacher], who is now the [named profession]. But she's been, she was teaching [named person] in [named area] to play piano. Something came up in discussion about me being interested in starting a school choir, and named teacher] said, 'oh, I'm running a department of education in service course, and Geraldine, if she wants to come down to [named area]'. So I did. Went down to [named area]. I got to know [named teacher] from there. I ended up traveling to [named city] in the summer of [named year] to Doreen Rao's CME Course. So, I suppose what I'm really saying is, I've come from, come to what I'm doing from the informal education background. And on the way I did kind of a lot of CPD.

Brian: And just to jump in there. So, in terms of formal education. With your choral conducting. And what have you done? And has that formal education had any aspects of changing voice mentioned in it that would help you with changing voices, and working with them?

Geraldine: Not specifically toward, not specific towards changing voices. The courses that I've done, and I've done a lot of CME courses which are the core music experience courses. I've studied with [named conducing teacher] in [named area], and I've done the

Estill Voice Course I did the ABCD conducting course in the summer. There was never anything specific towards adolescent and changing voices in my training. And I did a lot of my own research in that area, like buying books and things like that. And I suppose just learning myself as I went along with the various groups that I had, especially when I started [named choir] here in [named area], which was [named choir] before it became [named choir]. So that's kind of the level of I suppose the adolescent voice in my training. It wasn't kind of very specific.

Brian: Great, great, no fantastic. So, I'd like to move on to the next section, if that's possible. Now, and that is the professional practice part of the interview, and to start with, could you please share the specific experiences that you have working with adolescent male singers, so specific choirs, past and present that have had involved adolescent singers so they could be, you know, all male choirs, or they could be SATB youth choirs that contain adolescent boys. And adolescent for you, for you age wise, what are you talking? I suppose, I'm mainly kind of thinking through voice change. So, the time that boys go through voice change, and boys that you've worked with in various different. If you could name the different choirs that you've worked with.

Geraldine: Okay, perfect. Okay. So my first experience working with boys would have been with [named choir], which I formed in [named year]. And it was a progression path programme of junior choir, an intermediate choir, and a senior choir. So, boys would have been there from the very start junior level and then into intermediate level. The intermediate level kind of would have been boys and girls. But later on, and if you want to come back to this later. I separated that out for the boys separately. And so they, those boys, would have went on then. So, we rebranded as a [named choir] in [named year] and so those boys that would have been in the intermediate group then progressed on to the youth group of [named choir] which became a kind of an SATB choir. Also, my other experience would be would have been with [named choir] and [named choir] as well. So that'd be the that'd be the three, the three main ones, [named choir], [named choir], are all the one group. It's just a name change. And then [named choir] and [named choir].

Brian: Brilliant, brilliant, fantastic. And the next part of this question is, what were the tasks and responsibilities that you had when working with these young male singers going through voice change? So, tasks and responsibilities?

Geraldine: Mostly, I suppose, when I started off it was girls mixed with boys. Then eventually it was boys on their own so I would be very mindful of minding them if you know what I mean, and minding them in every manner of the word, minding them not just vocally trying to keep them engaged, kind of trying to keep an interest in them and trying for them to see that what they were doing was you know, a socially accepted endeavour, just like going to football training twice a week. So, beyond this, beyond the singing that I did with them, there was a lot of being mindful of nurturing them in every way, actually not just vocally so it was a much, much bigger picture than just getting up and standing in front of them and doing what you do with them and getting through a song. It was an awful lot more than that for me anyway. It was an awful lot more than that, because I felt I had to mind. I had to mind that group, and I the only thing I can compare to, I suppose, is that in an all-girls group you're always going to have enough. And then, in the all-male voice in front of you age maybe ten up to fourteen or twelve up to depending on how you work with them, and it's always a smaller number and I met lots of say boys who were not interested in sport and there was nothing much for them to do and they felt they didn't belong in school, because schools emphasised sports and I had parents come to me to say, 'oh, Geraldine, we're so delighted that we have found something that our boys like to do', and they feel that it's natural, and they feel belong, that they feel they belong. They feel accepted, for, you know for who they are, not, you know, because there's huge, my experience was, there was massive emphasis on sport for boys, and I just felt it was wrong.

Brian: And in terms of other like tasks and responsibilities that you would have with these young singers. Is there any other ones you'd like to add to that, like specific tasks that you would have had working with boys going through voice change or responsibilities for them as growing humans etc? You know.

Geraldine: Trying to keep them look researching repertoire that would have been suitable to the changing voice, so that they could keep singing, was quite hard to find, and if they

came up to me and there were, saying that we're finding something particularly difficult, I would say, well, just you know, maybe sing the notes that you can sing, and don't worry about not singing the ones that you can't that reach, whether it's too low or too high, or whatever way it was. And I guess, for me, an awful lot of those years that I would have spent early on were learning opportunities for me as well, that I was kind of growing along with the boys in my own skills as well. So, and I would have been hugely, hugely mindful of that, and you know I would. I would have bought some books about the adolescent male voice, and I would have heard stories about. Oh, you're meant to stop them singing when they reach a certain time, and they're meant to stop. And then I heard other and kind of things, 'oh, no, you keep them singing'. I kept them singing. I kept them singing all the time, and even if they weren't able to sing everything I got them to sing what they were able to sing. And I might have even gone as far as maybe changing a key of something just to suit the particular group, because we have to think, I had to think beyond. I suppose, that there is a way around everything. There is a way around keeping them singing. If it's so, if it's in the wrong key. Well, obviously the obvious thing you do is you change the key for them.

Brian: So, would you say, like the responsibility would be kind of to look after them and but also to do a little bit of research yourself to build up your knowledge so you can give that knowledge to them?

Geraldine: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think that's that was a huge part. I think if I was to think back of how, how I was successful in keeping those boys singing, it wouldn't have been about maybe more so. Maybe it wouldn't have been so much about the repertoire that I did with them. I think it would have been more so about the care and the attention, and the genuine, you know, and the genuine caring and attention beyond the music that kept them going.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant. No, that's really fantastic. And anything else you want to add there, or want to move on.

Geraldine: No, I think that's fine. Yeah, yeah.

Brian: Great, and in terms of the choirs that you worked with working with young adolescent singers. Did you find that when you joined those choirs, or created those choirs that there was any gaps in your knowledge that you had to go back and fill in like, what did you have to know? And what did you have to learn? You know, for the new choirs that you joined or set up.

Geraldine: Well, I suppose for me, because it was a learning journey for me as well, and I did as much. I did as much continuous professional development as I could. And it wasn't that I do a course and say, I know everything now, and I'm finished, and I don't ever have to do it again. What worked for me was every single year, every year I would do something to. I would go, bring myself somewhere to do an intense seven day, ten day, weekend, whatever it was, course somewhere to kind of learn more upskill, be reminded, maybe, of the things that I was forgetting about, because can actually quite happen very, very easily that we get into this. You know the same mode of doing things, or the same way of doing things and some. Then you go somewhere, and you realise, 'oh, gosh, God! I've been neglecting that a little bit'. So, you know, CPD was certainly there. I think there are always gaps, I think, for me, my experience was that I'm learning. I'm learning on my own journey as well, but I'm, I just wanted to be, I wanted, I just wanted to be the best that I could be at what I did, regardless of whether it was boys or girls I was working with, but definitely those boys were looked after, possibly a lot more better than those girls everywhere, just to keep them singing.

Brian: No fantastic, brilliant, brilliant. And so, the next section is about challenges and successes. And this is specifically in relation to boys changing voices. And so, if you could, would you be able to describe challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change?

Geraldine: I think the first challenge first of all, that I would have met with boys specifically, and maybe at the younger age of not necessarily where their voices were changing was, that when they were mixed with girls, there was a difference in maturity of age, of a ten-year-old boy, and a ten-year-old girl, or a twelve-year-old boy, and a twelve-year-old girl. And that's where my whole, that's where I changed my whole approach after a few years of having the boys and girls together putting extra work on myself

obviously. But that wasn't what it was, you know, at the root of it all was, how do I keep these boys in? So for me, when I separated them out I found that the boys worked much better on their own, I felt there was a what would you say when they were with the girls, the girls were kind of annoying them in a way that I don't know, but that's nothing to do with their changing voice. But for me it was what was at the centre of everything with me is, how do I keep these boys together? How do I like one is coming up saying, 'oh, my friend is leaving, so I'm leaving now', you know, and I found that as a challenge, that in a small group of boys that if one of them was to leave and it might be a leader, the others might say, 'oh, I'm going to go, too, you know'. So that was certainly a challenge for me, and it did happen. But I just had to deal with it the best way that I could. I think that would be the more the challenges. Then maybe within working with the adolescent boys in the SATB mixed of [named choir] the youth group again, would have been that I would have had to give a lot more attention to the general bass parts or the bass parts. And I just think that's in general, it just seems to be something I've experienced in any groups I've worked with even adults.

Brian: Can I jump in there? Because this is actually something that has turned up good bit, where you're in a rehearsal on your own as a conductor, and the tenors and basses may need a little bit more attention, and it's maybe hard to balance giving them attention. And the sopranos and altos sitting there. Would you consider that specifically a challenge yourself?

Geraldine: Yeah, I would have. I would have definitely would have been a challenge. But in in order to deal with that, I would have delegated, maybe somebody to, you know. Maybe leadership given leadership roles there for people to maybe take the tenors out and go over the line with them. So, I would. I think that's how I can. Again, it was kind of an all of a learning on journey for me. With regards to, I'm only one person, and I can't do it. I can do it all, but not to compromise one or two groups, because the other groups are not maybe coming up to scratch the way you like them to be. And so that certainly definitely was a challenge. Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

Brian: Yeah, yeah. Any other challenges that you can think of? Working with adolescent, changing voices.?

Geraldine: I think an awful lot of the challenges are indirect challenges that happen because singing is not enough been done in secondary school and schools. And I just think, I just think you know, if we're the culture of especially I think I for me, because we have the [named school] we have. Say, we have an all-boys primary school here in [named area]. We have actually want to. We have a junior and senior all boys, and we have another primary school that is all boys. So, you're working with all boys' primary school, and then some of them move on to an all-boys secondary school in the [named school] here in [named area]. So, this is just my experiences of my of what I had to deal with. Sport seems to be very more important in these schools than anything else. Something like I do is not kind of embraced as much as a team event as football is, or hurling, or those things? So, I think the challenge would have been that whole, you know, how do I get interest within the schools to join? Because I was working in an after-school community group. I actually went into two boys' secondary schools, for I'd say a full year, and I did what I call a lunchtime singing club. And I probably had maybe in one school, maybe between five and ten, and in the other school like the same. But the results of that for me were all worth it, because I had from both of those schools I had about three or between three to five boys come and join my after-school community group. Because of that was hard work. That was bloody, hard work because it was. And you and you know you approach a school to do something, and or lunchtime kids have to have their lunch, and they're very reluctant to timetable something to work with us. But if you want to bring them off to play a football match, there's no problem. So, there's a lot of challenges and awful lot of challenges. Yeah.

Brian: I was going to move on to the next kind of section in this, which is successes. But I think we can class that previous thing you talked about as a possible success, maybe, could we? That I know you went in, and it was.

Geraldine: Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.

Brian: Six boys, or five or six boys, that are now singing in your choir.

Geraldine: Working with a small group of boys over maybe forty minutes, forty-five minutes. And you're working really, really hard, knowing maybe that am I getting anywhere? But then you discover that one or two of them, or three that might come and join you, your youth group and they end up, they actually ended up being worth their weight in gold. And that's the way I've only described it all these years, I said. You know that one person who came to me from the [named school], and that one person is now still singing in [named area].

Brian: Yeah.

Geraldine: And is in a big choir in [named area], you know. Like one of the names, one of the things that came to me between yesterday and today. Looking at your questions was, I think, of [named singer] in who sings now with [named choir]. So [named singer] was one of those kids who was in that all boys group and who never liked sport. And all of a sudden, like, you know, his other three- or four-year brothers were big into sport. [Named singer] never was. He was the oldest, you know. Challenges, challenges like that in the family and in the family of all boys are actually hard. And then to know that he then moved on into the tenors and basses of [named choir]. He then went on to college, sang in a choir in college. He now finds himself in [named area], and he's singing with [named choir]. That means the world to me. If we don't catch them, and if we don't get them at that age, and don't give them a sense of belonging or a sense of acceptance of themselves we're in trouble, and there's an awful lot of that around. I think.

Brian: Yeah. Yeah. And any other success stories that you have working with adolescent boys across all your choirs. And it could be like any kind of success. Really, I'm looking for, you know whether it's a musical success, whether it's non-musical success?

Geraldine: I just think the whole for me with for me, with the [named choir] or [named choir], when I decided to change that choir from an all-treble choir into an all-mixed choir. It just it. Just really this, the for me, that was a success. To be even able to do that. Okay, it was a struggle, because I was always low in numbers, and you know of in tenors and bases. And I also think, being in [named area]. I think when you're in a place like where I'm not in [named area], so I think it's very, very different when you're in a county

like [named area], and you're trying to do what you do. And when there's not much of what you do happening around the place. Whereas I think you know, if you go to [named area] you'll always have the choice to join X, Y or Z, or, you know, do this down here. Probably what I, the choir that I had was probably the only choir in the whole county at that stage, working to the level that I was working at and I think maybe one, I think, coming into my mind now is, I think, the major success for me, working with adolescent boys, even if they even if it is as a part of this, soprano Alto tenor bass grouping is, the success for me was that none of those kids I ever worked with were auditioned. And what sticks out to me is. I believe, I believe, I believed in all of them, and I knew what they were, what their potential was. I did, and certainly came across boys who would have been, who would have been challenged to, maybe to maintain pitch. But I always found a way around it, and I always maybe did a little bit of one to one with some of them. I would always make sure they're placed between two strong singers. Sometimes that all sizzled out then, and then they became really good.

Brian: And I might hold you. If that's okay with this point for another question later, which is very linked to this, if that's okay?

Geraldine: Yes.

Brian: So any other challenges or successes? Or do you want to move on from that? That's.

Geraldine: No. I

Brian: You can come back later.

Geraldine: I think I think that's it. Really, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Brian: Great. Okay.

Geraldine: Like separating out the boys was definitely a success for me, and I know I know maybe they weren't at that. They weren't at the at the point of their voices

changing. But it was a stepping stone. It was a stepping stone towards keeping them singing so that they would stay through the voice change, and I think that was a huge important contribution to the success of those boys moving on.

Brian: Brilliant, fantastic. And so, I might move on to the next section. And so in the next section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers. To start with, what, in your view, are the traits or skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change? I suppose traits for me. I would be kind of like how you deal with people you know, and skills are actually specific skills that you believe are needed to work with young voices.

Geraldine: I think, having a genuine interest. I think you have to look beyond the job, your specific job of, say, teaching a song or getting a song into a group of people that you look at the people who are in front of you. You see the people who are in front of you and you allow the space that you don't get carried away yourself to and get kind of in your own little world of, you know, 'oh, I do this now, and I do this next, and I do this next', and you have my plan. And all of a sudden my plan has gone out the window, and what do I do? And so, I think you have to be flexible. I think you have to listen. I think I think we have to listen a lot more than we're listening. I think we have to allow space for discussion and that's a huge part of my work, and I might have been told once or twice by someone else that I talk too much. But I have never, I always feel that a piece of music is much more than the sheet that it comes on, that it's printed on the dots and tails that are on the sheet. We need to get to know this song. We need to get it, not know just musically, but in every way we can do.

Brian: Would you say just in terms of the question that you would? I be right in saying that you think that one of the traits is that a conductor should be an open person who understands young people and allows a safe space for conversation about the music, and also non-musical discussion when it's relevant?

Geraldine: Absolutely. And I think, yeah, I mean, yeah, absolutely all of that. You said it much better than I said it, Brian, but absolutely you were much more yeah, eloquent

about it than I was. But I suppose I had [some male children], and I knew, I kind of, I know how active boys can be and I think you have to allow that space for them to kind of. Let their energies go as well. You can bring them back in, and personal traits, and empathy, understanding and eye contact genuine, you know, looking at the person and letting them know that you understand them. Being open to their suggestions, but also being guiding them. Maybe a discussion could come up, maybe around a particular song they would like to do. Obviously, when that happens, it's probably something that's out there that's popular at the time, you know that they want to do it, and you've got to work your way around. Well, whether, first of all, I think another, maybe a trait is, or maybe it's not. Maybe it's a trait or a skill. I'm not sure but repertoire that is appropriate for the group of people that you're working with.

Brian: And I will have a section on repertoire later, just to mention that like, I'll talk about that later.

Geraldine: Yeah, that's grounded. They may only know this much, but we it's our job to bring them out here. Skills I suppose you know. For me it was continuous professional development in every area of vocal and, for everyone I was working with regardless whether or regardless of boys and vocal health keeping. And for me, I suppose at the start I was, I was literally, I suppose, keeping myself one step ahead of everybody else, and because I was kind of learning on my journey as well, and for me, I also think that was quiet, and what would you say, a successful part of my overall journey, because I was, I was conscientious, and I was about upskilling myself as much as I could, learning as much about the voice as I could. And the body connected to the voice. You know that the voice is not just from here up and everything else. So, I did an awful lot of my own research. I did an awful lot of my own reading, and I did courses where I could do courses, and to kind of awaken different things within me that I might be able to bring into the room that I'm teaching in.

Brian: Brilliant, and we'll be talking about some of those things in a few minutes. And what advice would you have for new or aspiring conductors in this field of working with adolescent boys?

Geraldine: I think they have patience, and I think you have to ask yourself why you want to work with them? Is it about you as a conductor? Or is it about developing in a relationship with the group in front of you? A genuine relationship that's going to come out through the music. So, I think that's for me is the most important thing. I think I suppose I was older than most people coming to what I do. I had a bit of life experience behind me in that I had [male children]. You know, there were actually [named ages] before I ever started any of this work. And so, I kind of I kind of in some ways I kind of feel I had had knowledge of what it's like to have a gang of boys around me which was very, very helpful. I think you have to love what you do really. Yeah, so the genuine love for what you do. The path is not going to be easy. I think you have to have patience. I think inclusion for me would be a huge part of advice for new aspiring conductors. Because I think I think as a as a new conductor, I think we can. I could. I could see that a new conductor is going to be really, really excited about, 'oh when I have a choir I want to do X, Y, Z'. And they already have a plan in their heads of what they want to do. But maybe, and they get carried away with that plan, and then they get carried away with, 'well, I'm going to audition now, and I'm going to get the best singers' and blah blah and all this, and I just think for me! It was quite the opposite of that. While I was excited I knew that the process for me. Because it has shown me that the process of my work was where the magic happened with particular individuals, seeing them grow and seeing them get to the next level, or seeing them build confidence, seeing them smile, seeing them enjoying their singing, see them embodying their singing, seeing them being proud, confident. And I and it's, I think we're, I think I've been very, very lucky that I've been able to work with boys who have maybe started with me at five or six, and who are now still singing into their twenties and their thirties. And that so that I've watched that journey, and so I think my I think my advice to be was to be. I think my main advice would be as inclusive as you can to allow everybody to find their voice. I've seen firsthand what that can do for someone's character, someone's personality, somebody's sense of well-being, somebody's sense of finding their tribe, and a sense of being myself and my advice would be not to get too carried away on not to get too carried away with or looking for the best singers. Because in some way, for me I discovered it's not always the best singers who are the ones who are going to pull it off for you. It's the ones who've maybe had to put the extra work in.

Brian: Yeah.

Geraldine: And there are some, obviously, you know, naturally talented people out there. But I've had equally amount of boys along the way, who would have struggled, but came through and came through. And it was through. It's through patience, I suppose, and it's through an interest in in that person individually and as the group in the in the group as a whole for me.

Brian: I think it's interesting what you said there about the process being as important as the product, you know, and that I don't know if you come across Patrick Freer, he's one of the writers on this over in America. But one of the things he suggests that in some cases to consider for changing voices, that choir does not have to have an end performance always.

Geraldine: Yeah.

Brian: But sometimes you can have a certain choir that is all about the process, and it's all about just enjoying singing that you don't necessarily always have to perform. I don't know what your thoughts are on that? It's kind of related to what you were saying, isn't it, that if a young conductor goes in, and it's about, the main thing is the Christmas concert or the summer concert. But actually, what you're, I think what you were saying is that to focus on the process, and almost everything else will kind of sort itself out. Is that kind of what you're saying?

Geraldine: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, I think. And I have been guilty of getting carried away myself because you have deadlines, you know, and you're kind of seeing 'oh, now I have to do this, this, this, this' but I think if more, if more thought, and maybe belief in the process is within the person that the opportunities to perform will come. But you have to be patient, and you have to allow that process to and start somewhere, and I think the only the only example I can give you, I suppose, of and things that I might have worked with, say, I would have done say with and maybe [named choir] as an all treble choir, and I might have done the same piece with [named choir] all treble choir, and the end result of both of those processes was no different. The difference was that the process

was longer with [named choir] than it was with [named choir]. And I deliberately wanted to discover that for myself, because you're constantly asking yourself questions about how you work. You're constantly asking yourself questions about, you know. I you know I'd like to do this song. But is this, you know? Are they going to be able for it? You know. And I think sometimes, as conductors. I think we're the ones that put limitations on them through our perceptions, our perceptions. So that would be another bit of advice, maybe, that I would give to an inspiring conductor is in the field would be that as well that you don't put limitations on the young people that you kind of a don't get don't get too caught up in saying, oh, 'they'll never be able to do that. But they would be able to do this', because the stuff that I thought I'd never be able to do I actually did. The process would have taken longer to do. But I didn't care about that. And that's what I loved about having my own programme having my own programme allowed me to spend time on that process. Yeah, as, and you've got that. Probably you know that luxury within DYC between yourself and Lynsey to a certain extent as well, because you're the bosses of what you do, whereas when you're working for somebody else. your you're always on a deadline to get X, Y and Z done. And chances are some things get lost in that. And it's not the music things that get lost. It might be the relationship building that gets lost.

Brian: Yeah, yeah, it's very interesting. Will we move on to the next section? Is that okay? In the next section, what I was hoping to do is just ask kind of a series of kind of quickfire questions almost like kind of like. They can have shorter responses. If you want just your opinions on various different aspects of working with changing voices, and the first one I'd love to talk about is your approach to repertoire selection when you know that you're going to be working with changing voices. And I suppose it depends you know, on the choir, you know, in some cases you may have been working with all boys. In some cases, it could have been, you know, an SAB where there's one part it could be SATB but just broadly. What are the things you're looking for when you're choosing repertoire? When there is changing voices in your group.

Geraldine: My own experiences of, say, working with all boys only would have been with [named choir] or [named choir], whereby the boys were all treble voices. But still the choice of repertoire was so important when they were all boys of that age, even though their voices weren't changing, and so I would. I've I think I spend a lot of time researching music. And I think that's been a huge part of the success of any program is

the repertoire that you use, and I think we I think I might have had a perception of all the boys won't like this, but they'd love this, and actually ends up that they might love the one that I thought they wouldn't like or that we have this perception of. Well, boys need the fast stuff and the rhythmic stuff, and the heavy stuff, and all this, and they don't like the kind of the nice, you know things, and in actual fact they do. So, my experience of all boys would have been, I suppose, where their voices wouldn't be changing, and then my other experience of working with them would have been in the context of, say [named choir] or [named choir], as an SATB choir. And again, because maybe numbers are low in in the in and within, in both groups of the boys, tenors and basses. Again, I think with [named choir] I would have started doing a lot of stuff for SAB, and I would look at that range of you know of the range of where that B line is, you know, and seeing how can we work around it? If there's going to be problems? The SATB stuff, then I would have done that with [named choir] and [named choir]. Yeah, I think when they're at that changing voice I would have been more mindful of looking for. I would be looking at the range, but once they were established. I would have. I wouldn't have had felt I had to look at that anymore.

Brian: But it's that transition you're kind of. You're really.

Geraldine: in that transition to, because you didn't want them to check out on you, either to say, you know, or I'm not coming here anymore. I couldn't sing anything today, like, you know. So it was that constant thing of keeping them engaged all the time.

Brian: And what's your approach in terms of assigning appropriate voice parts? It's kind of linked to what we were talking about there. But how do you? I suppose if you've you know singers in front of you, how do you know what parts to put them in?

Geraldine: Yeah. Well, for me, it was kind of, I'm quite slow to put anybody into one particular group, and I kind of get them all, maybe singing in the one group, and then after a while, seeing who's able, more able for the high, more able for the lower whatever. Yeah, and I wouldn't, wouldn't have specifically sat down with them on a one to one at any point, and I would have just had them all singing and all singing and all singing, and just going around listening to them, and then there will be the time that the

hand goes up and say, ‘Look, you know, Geraldine, I really find it hard to go up there, or whatever, so can I?’. So, and the same with the girls and the boys, and I know the girls don’t. Their voices don’t change to the same level, but I’d be very conscious in [named choir], for example, if the altos should they be staying alto all the time? I don’t like. I don’t like putting them into, when they’re so young, I don’t like to say you’re a tenor. You’re a bass because a lot of the time over experience, you can you? Over the years of experience you can A bass can actually use their falsetto voice very, very well, or you know, so they can. And I don’t like anyone losing their range either, when they’re so young. So, I would, I would definitely have had an approach of trying, trying everything until you find something rather than saying, oh, you’re this, or you’re that.

Brian: And can I just go back one question, sorry, for a second, to repertoire linked to what you’re saying there? About the idea of not forcing labels on young singers too early. Does that affect your repertoire choice in terms of voicing? You know, do you do much equal voicing music for that reason? Or just wondering, you know.

Geraldine: Just sorry. Just say that again, Brian. Sorry.

Brian: And does that affect your repertoire choice? The idea that you don’t like to put labels on young singers too early.

Geraldine: Well, I think if I, if I would say if I had a smaller group of boys in a mixed context, and that would have been the start of [named choir] would have happened like that. Where I would have had a smaller group of boys, and everything that I would have picked would have been specific towards SAB.

Brian: Yeah.

Geraldine: In as and I would, but I’d be looking at that range of that line as well, you know. Yeah, so it would. It would affect. Yeah. An awful lot of for me was about numbers and balance, trying to get a balance of voices. And like I’ve had, I’ve had I’ve had in my youth group in [named area], I’ve had girls sing tenor lines you know. You know, if you can have male altos, why can’t you have female tenors, and I know the

strength is not going to be as good. But you know there's always. I think sometimes we can get too well for me, my experience of is if you always just go by the book in everything, and it's important that going by the book is definitely there as a guide, but I always think that there's ways that we can think around those as well.

Brian: Yeah, no, brilliant, brilliant. And what's your approach to retention of young male singers in the choir? What do you think are the things that have maybe worked for you in relation to retaining boys in the choir? Through voice change, boys that are going through voice change.

Geraldine: Certainly, in my experiences say within this [named choir] and [named choir], would have been that when I separated those boys out so I could have had a group of boys from the age of maybe eight, nine up to twelve, thirteen, fourteen in one group and the repertoire certainly. And can you keep to keep them. And concerts, then that maybe I would join them with the girls for the concert, so that they're even though they're rehearsing on their own. they knew there might be something coming up where we all the choirs come together, that would have been the kind of incentive to keep them singing, too.

Brian: I suppose, what you're saying there kind of is that that, like you put a plan in place that they know something is coming up.

Geraldine: Yeah.

Brian: That is kind of something to really look forward to is that kind of what you're saying.

Geraldine: And even like a simple trip, an outing here or there, or a social, a social thing that we do, or a few games that you play you know you might be asked. Somebody in [named area] might be looking for a group to come and sing a few songs somewhere, or you might bring them up to a you might bring them up to a nursing home, and they might sing, you know, just with backing tracks for the patients.

Brian: Yeah.

Geraldine: Anything like that that ever kind of came up. I would that would have kind of for me would have kept the interest in for them, going from the retention point of view, but it was always I have to say that it was definitely, always a struggle, and one of the biggest struggles I found with retention was that if one person left and they were kind of in a group of maybe two or three friends that the other two, maybe, who might not been as strong as in leadership you know a week or two later they say, 'oh, I don't! I don't. I'm going to give up', you know.

Brian: Yeah, yeah.

Geraldine: And I also think, and this is something that's a lot in my head. Like, if football, if football teams train twice a week. Why can't choirs meet twice a week? What's the difference? You know? I think there's a there's a net there's a job that we have to do, to create awareness, and with parents as well.

Brian: And I'm going to hold that thought Geraldine, because that's later on, if that's okay, because I know you probably have a lot to say on that and. What's your approach to teaching young males' vocal technique.

Geraldine I would, I would approach vocal technique with the boys, like as I would have when I had them in, say, as an all treble group the same way as I would have done with the girls. The boys, the tenors and basses of the youth group would do the same exercises as the boys and girls, and if we were doing a warmup, and I would, I would be able to say to them about, just, you know. Bring it down the octave once it got too high for them, or whatever like that. But I never kind of I never. I've never really kind of treated them separately with regards to vocal warm-ups or anything like that. So, I've always kind of done what's worked. That's worked for me.

Brian: And kind of linked to that. Do you ever like talk about vocal anatomy with the male singers? Or anatomy in general. You know about the body as an instrument?

Geraldine: More so, the body as an instrument, more so. Rather than specific areas. I would, I would do it through them, experiencing things like, you know, a cough or a sneeze, or things like that. What happens when this happens within our body? You know that your voice is not just from here up that you're always connected. You can sing from your you know, your whole-body sings when you sing. I would approach it in a very holistic way, breathing breaking the breathing thing right back down into, you know how the breath comes in rather than specific things of, you know, maybe probably should have. Maybe thinking back probably could have used more terminology. But what worked for me was, and I just kind of feel across the board the more holistic you can make that connection for them, and the easier it is for them to take it on. And then maybe you can bring the terminology in, or show them the show them that the images, or whatever.

Brian: I'm just wondering. Have you noticed any difference in the response from the boys going through voice change and the girls when you talk about like the physicality involved in singing? Or have you noticed any difference?

Geraldine: Not really. I suppose I I like, haven't I haven't. I haven't kind of probably delved into it in a way that I probably should have had should have or could have. Obviously, the girls change is not as big as the boys. I think the boys can be very self-conscious maybe when depend when the voice changes. Yeah. And I think you know. I would be more kind of towards the girls respecting the voice chain than actually noted the difference. I would be more. I'll be more kind of making sure that they don't, that they accept that the boys voices change a lot more than theirs. Yeah.

Brian: Yeah. Yeah. And one last question in this section is, like, how do you approach the idea of mentorship and say, having vocal role models in the choirs that you've worked with, and maybe the importance that that would have to encourage the boys to sing and keep singing.

Geraldine: Yeah, I think I think mentorship is a huge part of it, or a voice leader in a particular group of you know, tenor based, you know, having a few tenors there who, you know, are the strong ones and the ones that maybe if you, if you give them a bit of

responsibility to maybe look after everybody else in their line, that it definitely has that knock on effect of building them all around together. And I think, as role models, it needs to be rather than maybe, you know, sending out a girl to go through the tenor line with the boys, you know, with the boys that they need to see the role model with within their own group, and I would have always been looking for I would have always encouraged any of the groups I was with, and that to happen within, within the groups as well.

Brian: Fantastic, brilliant. And when we move on to the last bit of the interview, is that okay?

Geraldine: Yeah.

Brian: And so the last bit of the interview in this section. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing, going. And to start with, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland?

Geraldine: Gosh! Well, in all of my years. I've been doing this since [named year], and participation of boys in choirs in Ireland. It's always been a challenge. First of all, to get participation, and I believe that the answer in getting boys more boys participating, participating in choirs in Ireland is and has to be at the primary school end, because if they're not going to get it there, they're not going to get it. There's not enough awareness. And there's still a huge barrier for boys to be in choirs, I think, with regards to the perception of boys singing. There's definitely, and I've seen it all up along, and I kind of still see it to a certain extent. That's an, the boys who are not so nice will skit the boys who are in the choir and ask them 'oh, you must be gay if you're in singing in the choir', and I think that there is a huge narrative that has to change. I think there's a narrative that has to be, brought to the fore that a boy singing in choirs is no different to any group of boys going out to play a football or a hurling match, or whatever they're doing. And unfortunately, that's not always the way here in Ireland. I'm not sure about anywhere else but I know I know some of my own boys in [named choir] would have dealt with a lot of grief from their own peers and their own secondary school, because they sang with me. But they used they were strong, and I think if you're strong you'll come through that. My

fear would be for the boys who are not strong, and who like singing, and they won't keep going because their friends maybe skit them about it, or whatever, and I think it might seem like a very kind of simple, petty thing, maybe to talk about. But I think it's huge, and I still think it's out there, and I still think, and boys in choirs like. If you ask someone about a boy in a choir first of all, they think church choir first of all, they'll think serious. First of all, they'll think holy, you know, if you were, if you were to do that box pop on the street of what a choir is in general, and I think the narrative has to change. Choirs have changed. The type of choirs we have now in Ireland are all. It's all changing, and but it hasn't necessarily helped at the younger age for the future, and I think, and every child is born with a musical instrument, an inbuilt musical instrument. I believe in the innate musical ability of every boy and girl, and I don't think in schools there is enough emphasis or enough awareness of our young people using their bodies to their full capacity in every area where you don't need something else to do. You know you don't. You might need a football to kick a ball. But to sing, all you need is the person, the body, the voice and I just think there's a huge, there's a huge gap in participation of boys, and I also think, from an overall health and well-being perspective that everybody is missing out on. Think the government at large are missing out big time on what singing can could do for young people to develop them personally and build character, give them perseverance, build resilience. I think all of those things are being missed big time by those people in power. I also think a huge problem is at teacher training level. Now that music has now become an optional subject which is for me is very heartbreaking, and I think for any of us who work in that area. There was a time when you went for your primary school interview, and you were told to bring your instrument along with you that you had to have some level of music, musical skill to become a primary school music teacher that's completely gone and I can't understand how or why that it has come to this in Ireland. It really makes me very upset when I think of the opportunity we missed. I think of I mean, I'm looking at my old all my boys. Some of them joined, my [male children] joined the choir for me after just to keep me happy for a while. But the work, anyway, it was never for them. But my heart would be, my thoughts would be foremost with thousands and thousands of boys out there who have no interest in sports whatsoever, and who, unfortunately, some parents will think there's something wrong with them if they're not interested in sport which I find cannot understand that. And it has often made me think in my own household in some ways about you know what [family

member] would have thought if the lads had never been involved in football, or they didn't like football, and how that would have been accepted if they weren't? You know, it's that generational thing or that. But we've been all pre, what would you say? We've been all kind of everything is already in our heads as to what boys should do, and I think that narrative has to change. I really do.

Brian: The perception, how do we change the perception of choral singing for children? Yeah.

Geraldine: It needs to be like, yeah. And it is even the word choir, like, you see, there's a move away from choir. You see sing Ireland, rebrand, or, you know, Association of Irish Choirs rebounded as Sing Ireland. Now I can see why they did that, because you have, you know, Sport Ireland, Athletics Ireland, Cycling Ireland, you know, whatever it is, all the different things. So now we have sing Ireland, but mean a group of people who sing, is a choir. So I just yeah, it's something that I've really thought about a lot. Yeah, and in some measure, determined yourself 'oh, I'm going to change things'. But one person can't change something. But a group of people can change something. And I think and it's great that you're doing this research, because I think I can only imagine that a lot of people depending on how many people you're interviewing will probably say much the same thing about the perceptions that are out there, and but, as you say, challenges, how do we change those now?

Brian: Absolutely amazing, Geraldine, I think. Will we finish up there?

Appendix K
Interview Transcript – Harry

Brian: Okay, so good afternoon, Harry, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male adolescent voice change. And, to start with, I'd love to maybe look a bit at your own choral background, you know. Can you tell me your experiences growing up, and maybe a bit about your experience of experiencing voice change? If you can remember what it was like going through voice change yourself?

Harry: Yeah. So thanks, Brian. Thanks for inviting me to do the interview. So yeah, my choral background would be, I've limited enough musical kind of experiences in primary school, but I was interested in music and had been taking kind of piano lessons since I was seven. I have had very musical grandparents who encouraged me. They were part of a kind of a show band back in the kind of sixties, seventies, and maybe early eighties. So, there's great encouragement there for me to get involved in music. But really, I suppose my first significant choral experience was in [named school] in [named area] with [named teacher]. So, when I arrived into [named school] in first year, the previous year, that choir had one what was kind of a kind of I don't know short lived competition, but seemingly quite significant competition. But it was [named choir competition] that ended up being the final being held in the [named venue]. I think it was sponsored by [named sponsor] or something like that at the time, but they had won that. And the choir was one hundred to maybe 120, all boys' soprano, alto, tenor, bass. And so, from first year, right through to sixth year, there was no real fourth year at that point. And so that was my first major experience of choral singing, and it was a really significant one. The story goes, that although I wouldn't like my students to hear this, because I'm very strict about being on time. But I was late for a rehearsal. I had gone into town to get something to eat, and I got delayed, and I was late for a rehearsal. And we rehearsed in a chapel on the third floor of [named school], and quite a lovely chapel, and really lucky to get to rehearse there. And I walked down the centre of what was a very big group down the aisle, because the choirs were sitting in the choir, was sitting in the pews. So, I walked down the centre of the choir, and they were singing [named piece of music], and it was kind of the first time I'd

ever really heard the whole choir, because there was about forty sopranos in the choir, and I was pretty much flabbergasted by it. I couldn't believe how kind of amazing it was so. I was twelve years of age at the time, and that always stuck with me about the kind of real power of choral music. I think [named teacher] unfortunately left for a role in [named area], and so he left when I was in [named school year]. So, the choir kind of a little bit petered out then, and that was at the time when my voice change started. So, I actually wasn't doing a whole lot of singing, choral, singing, or even singing otherwise, because the choir yeah, you know, petered out or wasn't really active. So, I don't remember a whole lot about my own kind of my own voice change because it wasn't really troublesome, because I didn't have to kind of deal with any issues because, I wasn't doing a massive amount of singing. I knew it was happening, of course, and that there were creaks and groans and yodels, and so on, going on. But you know it was, that was all fine. And that would have been my kind of experience during my younger years of my adolescence. I'm not sure if you're interested in anything after that.

Brian: Maybe a little about kind of your like your late teens, kind of early twenties, because your voice is still kind of developing during that time.

Harry: Yeah. Well, I kind of recognised very early on that, I wanted to be a music teacher, and I think my parents mentioned to me that I kind of started talking about that since I was about seven or eight. So, I wanted to be a secondary school music teacher, and the music degree that I wanted to do most was the one in [named area]. It had a very, very good reputation and it was a broad music degree, a balance of performance and academia. So, I needed two instruments for that. So, whilst the piano was going well, I took it upon myself to sign up for voice lessons at the music school when I was sixteen. So that's when I started training with [named teacher], who was the teacher there, and quite an experienced baritone kind of operatic voice. And so, yeah, he was trying to help me with my technique. But also, I was an emerging, I was kind of emerging out of my voice change still, and while my low notes. I think, I'd kind of bottom out, bottomed out a bit, I kind of probably reached the end of my, the largest part of my voice change the top notes from a kind of a C sharp up were for, and I was a baritone. I could sing quite low, but I was probably a baritone, and my notes from C sharp, C sharp up, were a real struggle. and I would kind of whenever I would see them or feel them coming up. There

was a little bit of panic about those, and there was always a kind of a concern and a worry. And that was a technical thing as well, for sure. But I don't think [named teacher] probably knew or worried too much about voice change, and it was never quite explained to me that, and that those notes would probably broaden out in time, as my voice kind of continued to and become stronger, muscularly, and as my technique developed as well. So I kind of thought this was a kind of a singular problem about my voice, but it was just part of my kind of wider development. But yeah, I think as I went through kind of my late teenage years, it wasn't really until typically enough, I would say I reached my mid-twenties, that I felt that I had kind of a voice that was now very much in in my control, and I felt in charge of and comfortable with. I knew its limitations. And I kind of yeah, I was. I was able to kind of use it in the kind of ways colour, wise or technical wise the ways I wanted to do. But yeah, I'm singing quite a lot. In fact, I changed over in second year of college. I realised that kind of singing and chord music was where I wanted to be, so I changed over to being my voice as my primary instrument for performance. And I made my piano my second instrument. And yeah.

Brian: That's a really good background there, Harry. And the next thing I want to ask you about is so your professional background in choral conducting, and specifically like, is it possible to look at what formal education you've done, that involves choral conducting, If there was any? And also, any informal training that you've done in choral conducting? And the main question I want to know, was there anything on these courses that taught you about the adolescent, changing voice? So, from these formal courses, formal education, and informal education, is there anything that you learned about the adolescent voice?

Harry: I struggle to remember instances where it came up to be fair in my own college. The college experience, it didn't. I did many courses with conducting, with conducting both in Ireland and abroad. And again, I would struggle to kind of remember instances where the adolescent, changing voice was, was kind of brought up for discussion. I think sometimes it would maybe be mentioned quite kind of generally, or you know, maybe, if it might be mentioned if there were some younger singers there. 'If you can't sing that note, it's okay to leave it out or drop down the octave' or something like that. There will be tips maybe that would be just thrown in every now and again that you would pick up

on of course, you know, when somebody of you know of maybe who's in a kind of tutor role or leadership role, maybe with a lot of experience. You're constantly gleaning things from these people, anyway. And you know so, remembering kind of nuggets of information that you feel are important or might prove useful later on. But I would say, I would say no, no, no significant or no worthwhile discussion, really. I guess, yeah, it probably wasn't until a long time after I had kind of got interested in subject that I actually found some, a couple of people really. But one main person, [named vocal specialist]. When I was involved with the [named choir], that I actually had somebody who I could, I could talk to and have full discussions on the topic. Other than that, it was largely led by my own interest and my own kind of small amounts of research into it.

Brian: Great, so kind of like readings and kind of things that you might have found online that kind of thing?

Harry: Yeah, I ordered quite a lot of books. I try to just grab as much information as was kind of out there and was available. And sure, yeah, little bits of information on the internet again, like. I guess when I started doing it, of course, the internet was there. But it wasn't as kind of populated as it wasn't as it is now. It wouldn't have been as simple to find kind of good quality information as it might be now as well. But yeah, or ordering books, and then I guess as well kind of really trying to examine my own experiences with the people who I was teaching, and try to come to some kind of consensus on you know what I was seeing directly in front of me, and how you know how I felt boys voices were changing, and were what the capabilities were during that kind of periods. You know, from kind of ten through to well, mainly through to seventeen. But then, of course, then, there's more development beyond that. But those core kind of six to eight years of kind of ten to eleven, through to seventeen to eighteen.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. And I might move on to the next section, If that's okay? This section is about professional practices. And to start with, is it possible, could you share the specific experiences that you have working with adolescent male singers going through voice change? So maybe go through some of the choirs that you've worked with in the past, and choirs that you work with present that include adolescent boys. So, these

could be choirs that are totally made up of adolescent boys, or there could be choirs that include adolescent boys going through voice change.

Harry: Yeah, so I am involved with the [named youth choral music education programme]. And in that setup of or in that programme of choirs. We have six to seven choirs, and two or three of those would have adolescent male changing voices, or even adolescent changing voices. So, the [named choir] boys' choir, it was previously known as the [named choir], so I set that up kind of independently of [named institution], which it was at the time previously [named choir], and so that was called the [named choir]. But that's called the [named choir], and it's had a few different kind of age brackets over the time, but that has settled now as a fourth class to sixth class chord. So maybe we'll talk a little bit about the history of when boys' voices changed, depending on their class and stuff like that. We might mention that in a minute. But just to go over the different choirs first, and we that choir then led a few years back, led on directly to the [named choir], which is now [named choir], and that was for second class to sixth year. But we've slightly changed that now in that we have a junior youth corps. which is first to third year, and then we have the youth choir. We don't call them the senior youth choir, or anything like that, but they are the kind of senior youth choir. But the [named choir] are fourth to sixth year, and so I would say, although we don't have kind of and dramatically changing voices in fourth to sixth year, they're still, they're still very much on the move. And in some, in some rare instances it's definitely been noted before we've had people who are singers who, yeah, whose voices did change quite dramatically in fourth and fifth year, I would say even I had one student whose voice kind of hung on for many, hung on in the kind of tenor range for a long, long time when they were, they were destined to go down into bass baritone until their sixth year. And so that was kind of unique. And I knew that singer, because I was his voice teacher as well.

Brian: Yeah. And I will talk about that later actually. The idea of you also being a voice teacher is something that has cropped up in the interviews a lot. So, I'd be very interested to hear your opinions on that. Any other choirs that you've worked with over the years that have adolescent voices?

Harry: Changing voices. Yeah, well, I would have worked kind of sporadically with different kind of children's choirs and youth choirs locally, and so but guess my involvement with them, like, I worked in a in a school in [named area]. And yeah, I would have had to consider the kind of repertoire and what I was doing because of my awareness of maybe what is particularly fifth class and sixth class students were potentially going through and capable of. And so yeah, there would have been festival choirs that we ran for the [named festival] very big children's choir involved in that. It was a big project, and so, you know, dotted amongst my career were choirs like that. But I suppose the biggest one outside of [named choir] was my role with the [a national youth choir], where they were very, very keen to have a cambiata choir, as they termed it. So this is a choir, I suppose specifically to help the singers who were in [a national youth choir] to transition from a treble voice into a more I suppose a little bit more stable voice where they could handle repertoire that might be a bit more meaty in either the bass or tenor registers for [a national youth choir]. So, I was tasked with being that I think I was the first director of that group. So, it was called [a cambiata choir]. It was in the setup of [a national youth choir], and it actually ran at the same time as the boy's choir, and that was quite a sensible move, because everyone of a certain age and was their voice was checked or not assessed. It wasn't appraised in any kind of marking scheme or anything like that. They had passed their audition, but it was simply kind of checked to see what range they were at, and some of them may have expected that they would have been in the boys' choir, but it was evident that there, they were perhaps more suited to the cambiata voices. So, on the first day of choir of the course, this will happen. So yeah, that was another yeah, big, I suppose big involvement for me. I think I think I was there for [named amount of time]. Yeah.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. That's brilliant. And with these choirs, all of these choirs, what do you believe are your tasks and responsibilities when working with boys going through voice change? So, your tasks and your responsibilities for these boys?

Harry: Yeah. Well, I guess maybe start with the responsibility. I think the responsibility I would feel most is that you want your singers to be able to enjoy their singing and their experience, and that's multifaceted to that. That's repertoire, and that does come into the voice change as well. But you know generally repertoire that they will enjoy, and some of

that some of it may be easy for them, and that's good that they have a little bit of little bit of time where they're not always kind of on the hamster wheel. But then you have to balance that out with stuff that's challenging to them. To tie back in, that they enjoy their singing, to be able to enjoy your singing. If you have an adolescent, changing voice, you have to ensure that the part that they are singing, if there is part music involved, is completely within, or let's not say completely, because that's sometimes impossible, but I would say predominantly, if not largely, in their comfort zone when they're singing. And I think that is, so that is a significant responsibility when you're in charge of or you're overseeing a group that has changing voices. They need to be able to enjoy their singing and music and putting them and assessing them into the areas that they can feel, you know that they will be able to enjoy, is paramount. So that possibly leads in then to the tasks which are voice assessment. So, I think vocal assessments periodically throughout the year is essential to, you know, within the space of a month or two months, a voice can change quite dramatically. So, you've got to have systems in place where you can do that. And also, I think you've got to just be as a director, you've got to be looking out for signs where a student, you know, if a student is kind of looking a little bit uncomfortable in certain at certain times, in a song where they hadn't been a month previously. And that's the time to make five minutes at the end of rehearsal, or meet me five minutes early at the next rehearsal, and we'll have a listen to your voice and see where see where it is, so that they so that you can assure that they, if they need to move, they should move. I think also a big thing for me is, and providing information to students so that they can feel then that they can understand at first about what what's happening, because there are some kind of maybe unhelpful myths and kind of stories out there about how the voice changes, or head of a voice 'breaks', and which is a term I don't really like or ever really use but you need to give them good information that they'll understand that they can use so they feel in informed, and also that they feel that they can appraise where they are and, what's happening in their voice. And if something is changing, they kind of understand that, but they also that they can voice they can voice up, excuse the pun, but they can speak to you, and with any kind of concerns they might have, or and things that might be happening. Because if they're able to come to you and say, I feel I feel a certain way, or this is starting to change, it feels too high or feels too low, or whatever it might be, that's a wonderful thing, because they're keeping an eye on their own vocal health and asking for assistance when they need it. So, I think that's another really important task.

Brian: I think that area we're going to have a that'll come up a bit later when we talk about traits of good conductors working with boys and stuff like that. So that's fantastic. The next question I have is, with any of these choirs that you worked with adolescent boys when you arrived in them, were there any gaps in knowledge that you felt that you had to go and fill in? So, when you went over to [a national level youth choir], say? Or when you set up [a youth choir]? Were there were there any like gaps in knowledge that you were like kind of 'oh, God, I really need to go and learn about this, or I need to learn about that', in relation to the adolescent boys, voices?

Harry: Oh, absolutely yeah. So, when I started the boys' choir, and my first choir that I had myself was a boys' choir I started out, was in when I was in second year in college. So, I was absolutely green as could be. Just very, very kind of passionate and felt, and that this was a really good thing to do, but so little practical knowledge on that topic, and so many other topics like I was. I was even I would say, from a conducting point of view, I was kind of learning as I was doing it. And I, I'd say, didn't really come across it, didn't that that topic, the topic of adolescent change of voices wouldn't have really come across my, to the front of my mind it was obviously was something that happened, and you tried to deal with it as best you could. But it wasn't something that maybe came to the forefront of my mind until a few years after when the bridge between the boys' choir and the youth choir was, became there. So the youth choir did, wasn't in existence in [named youth choir] or in [named youth choir] at the time, and we actually built the choral programme kind of down the way, first down to the youngest choirs, and then the last choir that was added on was the youth choir, and until that kind of transition from boys, choir to youth choir was they became there it wasn't really a topic that I had to kind of deal with too much, because if somebody's voice changed, which didn't happen too often in the boys choir. We could bring them down to alto, and you, know we could kind of manage that for a while, but when they came into the youth choir, and they were all in a kind of a flux, that's when it became very obvious that I had to learn more about it. Because what do I do here? Do I have them sing alto? Do I have them sing tenor? Is it baritone they're supposed to sing? Like I had, I had no kind of clear idea for how I could deal with those changing voices. So, I felt it absolutely incumbent upon me to do some research and kind of try and figure out what was best for them.

Brian: Yeah, and with [a national youth choir], just wondering, because that was a new thing that was set up. And obviously you had the boys' choir, and then the cambiata choir. Was there anything kind of that you felt that like in terms of knowledge that maybe you kind of had to fill in? Kind of like, 'I need to learn this quickly', you know?

Harry: Yeah, I think, I think at that point, I had done quite a bit of research, and maybe I was being asked to do it because people felt I had a little bit of knowledge. Like I am, I would not at all call me a kind of an expert on this. I wouldn't call myself an expert on this. I felt to be to do what I could or to do the kind of best job I could, I felt I felt that I it warranted, you know, digging into and learning a bit about. But yeah, I suppose when I, when I got to [a national level youth choir] stage, I'd probably gone through maybe five, eight years of I'm kind of thinking about this and researching this, and the kind of limited ways that I did. And a kind of hands-on practical experience I think, being a singing teacher, and I won't get into it now, but I think, being a singing teacher as well where you really get to and get to see a single voice, and how it copes with the voice change and going from treble to maybe fully changed. That's really insightful and you know I would have taught many, many, and boys in particular. That became a kind of a became a thing that I became known for to kind of help boys through. So I did it quite a lot, but all of that helped me. So, by the time I got to [a national youth choir], I didn't feel like I was in big, in great need to maybe do anything. You know much more than I had done already. I was going over.

Brian: Most of the gaps were filled in at that stage? And it's kind of, it's really adding smaller little things at that stage that the really the heavy lifting was done? You think?

Harry: Yeah, yeah, I felt so like, I was going over there as a yeah, it was a dual job it was. It was to kind of take care, take care of these particular age cohort, but my main job was to go over there as a as a choral director. So I felt like I had enough knowledge to be able to care for them, and I also had the advantage that there were two very, very experienced vocal teachers who were on the staff, who are quite expert in this field as well. And so I was really reassured by that. So yeah.

Brian: Fantastic. So, I might move on to the next section. If that's okay? It's about challenges and successes that you've had while working with young adolescent males going through voice change. So, to start with, would it be possible to share some challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent boys? And these can be musical challenges or non-musical challenges. Just maybe list a few challenges that you've encountered over the years.

Harry: Yeah. Well, I think I think this is maybe not strictly, or it's hard to say if it's strictly what would I say, associated with just the voice change. But if we're talking about adolescent male voices, there's no question about it that when a boy who's interested in singing is going through that period in their life, that some of them are I think, self-aware to a point, and also that they feel maybe settled enough in their mind. And they love music enough that any of the external things that might be happening like slagging or and those kind of social things they're able to kind of, you know, they're able to say, 'okay, that's happening. But I don't really care. I'm prepared to. I want to be a singer. I love music, I love chorus singing'. I would say, a challenge for sure is, there may be social the stigma side of boys singing, and that's a big challenge. So, it's not maybe strictly to do with adolescence, but I think when it when it coincides with adolescence, when there's when there's all that, all that physical change and hormonal change that's happening at that time. I suppose also the kind of the psychological changes, or the want to be independent and make their own choices and things like that. All of that mix can unfortunately end up in very good and capable singers, very musical people, just taking the easy route and opting out, which is really unfortunate. And yes, the voice change might be a part of that, and kind of almost gives them possibly a little reason and you know that was my child thing, now that I have an adult voice, I'm not going to do that anymore. I'm going to change tack, or I'm going to sing in a band instead, or something like that. Well, if they're singing in a band, I think, fair dues, they've kept singing. I wouldn't have any issues with that. And so that's certainly a challenge. From a vocal point of view, I think certainly there are challenges in trying to and trying to make, like the first thing I said in my responsibilities, try and make the singing enjoyable. When you have so many kind of different voices, different kind of personalities, and different stages where they're at, you know it's it can be, it can be really difficult. And also, when you're programming music you're trying to, I talked about this you're trying to do for

kind of musical reasons. And what would I say? Music, that kind of means something to them on an emotional level you're trying to. You're trying to find music that kind of ticks many, many boxes, and trying to find pieces of music that can tick all of the boxes for you, which is, you know, it's maybe an impossible task that it kind of ticks every single box. But trying to find pieces of music that that marry all those things, and can and are suitable for all the different changing voice types that you might have is very, is very, it's very difficult. So that's certainly a challenge that is largely now.

Brian: Will have a section on repertoire later, where we can talk.

Harry: Okay.

Brian: Because it's a very important part. And any other challenges? Or do you want to move on to successes that you've had?

Harry: I suppose? Yeah, just motivation. Just when people are really, when people maybe struggle with it, or it's prolonged a little bit longer, and where they kind of struggle with it, where they see other singers mature a bit faster, or settle a bit faster, where they have more command over their voice, and they're still kind of going through it. And you know that kind of motivation to kind of our education as well, to help people understand, and to keep them going, that you know that it will, it is temporary and that sometimes can be a challenge. There's different things as well. I've come across boys who've just desperately wanted to be a treble all, for as long as possible. Not fully understanding, I don't think why they were reluctant to go, to leave, you know, leave their voice kind of descend, and for them to go with it. One particular boy, I'm pretty sure, very, very fine treble singer, got lots and lots of solos in his time in school and in our choir in or in [named youth choir] at the time, but my sense was that it was his treble voice was absolutely tied to his, his kind of not just personality, but the way his being, you know. And for that to for that to kind of go away and to disappear was something he was, it seemed to me, unwilling to let happen. So, he was holding and holding on, singing kind of a countertenor type of voice. When the advice was given to him, to maybe leave his voice, come down.

Brian: And this is something I've come across a huge amount in in these interviews. The idea that the male soprano, you know, we know, is revered, kind of, and people make have album deals. And we've Aled Jones and all of these people kind of like the famous person almost in in the community. And you know, nationally and internationally as well. And then suddenly they go through voice change. And psychologically, that's very challenging for them as you're saying, Yeah.

Harry: Yeah, for sure. For sure. So yeah, so there'd be, you know, not too many instances of that, but those kinds of personality, or kind of those the associations, the strong association, say associations that they had. but being a treble or a boy soprano, and all that changing. And dare, and dare I say it as well like, you know, there may be some kind of you know, sexual orientation and gender kind of things involved in that too sometimes too. And you it's hard for me. I never, ever discuss those things with any students. But you kind of sometimes get a sense that there's something in the background there preventing the student from just allowing their voice to go where it kind of naturally wants to go, and there's a there's a kind of an artificial, there's an artificial.

Brian: And maybe, they identify with a voice type, that's maybe not what they have, the one they have.

Harry: Yes, it was maybe a part of their, part of their sexuality, or that they, you know there. It's a difficult time, isn't it? It's a really difficult time. Where you're moving into adulthood. And there's all sorts of all sorts of things to contend with, and if kind of sexuality is one of those, and the voice, your voice kind of feels a feels a part of that process somehow, and it's all moving and changing. I'm sure it can be a and maybe unknown to themselves, be a factor of concern. So yeah, so there will be, I wouldn't necessarily single that out as a challenge, but I just think a challenge where singer or individuals kind of resist voice change for one reason or another is probably what I would say.

Brian: Yeah. And now, in terms of success, moments that you've had working with adolescent boys, is it possible to give a few? And this could be with, you know, an individual student, an individual success that you've had, or it could be with a group of

young singers in your choir. Maybe one or two kind of success moments that you've experienced over the years?

Harry: Yeah. Well, I you know I've always felt that I've always felt that for the people who stick with us in [named choir] that we, I think we do a reasonably good job on getting them through the voice change in a safe and healthy way, and without kind of necessarily singling out a particular group or a period in time where it went very well. I would say that in the main, that people who kind of come through the system we kind of, we recognise that this is an issue, and we care for it as best as we can, and by the time they get to kind of youth choir level, which is that fourth to sixth year, I think we have done pretty well by them to ensure that they feel confident in their in their voice, and they have a sense of their, you know they're their capacity, and you know where they maybe range wise and line wise, whether it be bass two, baritone, tenor two, tenor one, that they feel they understand their voice, and they know to know where they best fit in. So, I think that is success in in the main. Like there are lots of singers that we've had that have gone on to be conductors or professional singers and many of them guys, we've really good proportion of people who've gone on to be professionals or still involved in a serious way in kind of music making that have been boys. And I suppose that is because they had a chance here in [named area] because we have a choral programme, we had a boys choir, and we'll go on to talk about singing lessons, I'm sure, later, but we encourage many of them to take lessons, and so that they were studying with largely with me, but with some other teachers as well. So, I think that's definitely a success that lot of our boys have gone on to keep singing. So that's certainly something that we feel good about and feel proud of. I think my time with cambiata voices, I think that went well. I think the way we went about that, how we tried to educate the tutors in what we were trying to what we're trying to do and how we would, how we would go about, you know the day and the type of singing, and the quality of singing and the why we were assessing the way we're assessing it. So, I think that as a project, starting off that project and the repertoire choices that I made, I think I did a reasonably good job on that. So I think that was a success, too. And I would, yeah, I think I think they would be the two main things. Yeah.

Brian: Fantastic. One thing I'm thinking of as you're saying all these things that I think, am I right in saying that communication seems to be something that you value a lot when

working with these boys? You know, communicating to them you know about their voice change, to parents, and also, like you said there to the staff and tutors that you're working with, that there seems to be, you know, on your teams are really good communication about what's happening with everyone. So that's something you'd view is obviously very important. Yeah?

Harry: Yeah, I do. I do. I suppose you have to be a little bit careful as well that you don't come across too preachy, that you know you're talking peer to peer. But then, for sure, there's going to be some people who just don't really know a whole lot about this topic. And so long, I think, as it's done in a in the right kind of way, I think, yeah, I think it's really important that people are aware. Yeah. And it's like you said, it's absolutely right. The way through the kind of ecosystem, you've got to and talk to the boys. You've got to communicate with parents, and you've got to have little chats with staff.

Brian: Everyone's using similar language. Kind of, yeah?

Harry: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like our staff, I think, would have, well, they rely on me a bit, so you know, when it comes to say, auditions for the choral programme, and it's that age bracket, you know a lot of the time the guys will be sent to me. Or, you know, assessments and things like that, when we're doing them in choir, I will be the one who will kind of take those on whenever we have kind of the that boys' voices are adolescent voices. Not always not exclusively, because not always possible. But you know they realised that I what would I say that I'm yeah. They realise that I have a bit of knowledge, and I feel this is really important. And they kind of they kind of trust me, then, to be able to do, you know, do my best, then, when I when I hear them so but yeah, yeah, I think, communicate just to circle back. I think communication, one person can't do everything, nor should they. So it's, it would be bonkers to think that, you know I could cover everything just by myself in all those organisations, or all those choirs that I talked about, and it would be absolutely fantasy to think that I could touch on. you know, to do it properly just by myself. You need, you need a team of people, including the singers, to kind of have bits of information, the bits of information that they require, and maybe no more than that. And you know, so yeah.

Brian: Fantastic, great, and I might move on to the next section, if that's okay? I'd love to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young males? So, to start with, what, in your view, are the traits and the skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change? So, for me, like traits are kind of what are you like in front of the group, but the skills are like, really, the skills that you need to know.

Harry: But I'm going to be totally biased here now. I'm probably, it's a reflection of the way I am as a conductor, but I think you have to be motivational and inspirational. I think that's the biggest thing for boys. And they're not, it's not non-musical things. It's they are like, they're non-musical things. I think, boys, they really need that. I think they desire that. And so you know, to give people a sense of why you're doing something. I think that's really important. I think I look to be fair, it's important across all choirs, but you know, that's kind of less so, less important. Like, if you're working with a professional group they're not going to need, they might need some of that motivation and inspiration, I'm sure it'd be helpful at times, but they just need guidance, you know. It's totally different from a youth group. So, I think for boys in particular, I think that's a huge thing. Beyond that, the traits of a good conductor to work with them. Yeah, I think I think vocal ability and vocal understanding might be something that would be high up underneath those two things. And what I mean by kind of vocal understanding and vocal ability. I think it's important that when you're demonstrating for whatever age brackets, that you have an awareness of what the singers in front of you are kind of capable of. Even hypothetically capable of, not just the group in front of you, and what they're kind of, maybe actual capabilities are. But the hypothetical capabilities of them. And that yes, you should always strive for that highest hypothetical. But you know there's no point in, there's no real point in having a set of eight- to eleven-year-olds. and your you're chucking out your best operatic sounds to them. You know they're never going to be able to reproduce that. So, you have to kind of tailor your own demonstrations to what is needed for the group that's in front of you. So, I think vocal understanding. you know, vocal understanding of what they're able to produce, but also, then your own capabilities to be able to demonstrate for what's kind of needed. So, I think that.

Brian: We need good vocal pedagogy for young people is what you're saying? Like the ability to be able to, like if you give them too much kind of which are which are big operatic voice like you might need to kind of like tailor exactly what they need in order to develop their vocals. Is that what you're saying?

Harry: Yeah, yeah. And like, what I found, what I found really useful in my own teaching. Is this digressing? Maybe onto the sing and teaching thing. You can stop me if it is but.

Brian: Hold that. Is that okay? Until later, because you'll have a good bit of time.

Harry: Okay, yeah, no? Well, yeah, that's fine. Yeah. I'll try and remember and try and remember that that topic. but

Brian: So other traits and skills that you think are important. If you're in front of a choir?

Harry: Well, I'll just mention it, because it is, it is part of it. But I won't talk about it in any detail. I would say, understanding the physiology of the voice. Like having a having a really clear understanding about how the voice works, so that you can help people when there are issues with the overall sound, or when there might be an issue with how an individual is singing. If you have a clear idea of the physiology of the voice, and how we sing the way we do, I think you can be hugely helpful. And that's singing that singing technique in other words, I guess you could say that singing technique in some ways. Maybe it's a little bit little bit deeper than that, but essentially, it's kind of singing technique, I guess. Yeah, I talked about this earlier on as well, I think repertoire. When you're talking about that age cohort kind of eleven up, you're really at a prime age where you have to keep them, you have to keep them on board and enjoying it. So, repertoire, kind of choices, so a little bit of not just experience, but maybe background or research into the, you know, the repertoire choices that are out there, because that's, it's a huge, it's a huge field. Difficult to unearth pieces when there's so much stuff out there, and that's that will work for that age, that age bracket, both from a vocal point of view and from a kind of a, what would I say, a content point of view.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. And what advice would you give for new or aspiring conductors in this field? So, say if you had an assistant conductor working with your choir that's going to be working with boys that are going through voice change. What are the kind of two or three bits of advice that you'd give them, you know, when they're starting out in their career?

Harry: It's a good question. I would probably say the first one will be, try and find as much work, whether it be as an aide, or as an assistant. Or you know, to jump in. I won't be, I wouldn't be afraid to tell people to jump in and go back to their primary school and ask, could they help out, forming a choir. If somebody is an aspiring conductor, and they want to learn the bits and pieces of what it is to be a choral conductor, there's no better way of doing it, or no better way of learning than just doing it. You can read tons and tons of books. It could be a year reading books, and it's not going to prepare you as much as it would of just getting in there and get stuck in. It gets getting stuck in and doing it. So, I'd say the first bit of advice is to try and to try and garner as much experience as you can actually doing the job. And that's not always easy. There's not always, you know, opportunities there, but I think you can if you're and if you're kind of passionate, and you have a bit of energy about you. I think there are ways like I mentioned the school routes and kind of volunteering for things.

Brian: Be proactive?
Harry: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, be proactive, absolutely. Chase down opportunities. And they might not always be, you know the most rewarding or exciting opportunities. But actually, sometimes, or on the surface of them, they might not look that way. Sometimes those opportunities that you get, that where the choir might not necessarily be so experienced or so good if we can say that in inverted commas. Some of those experiences can be hugely rewarding, for both the singers and the new conductor. So, I'd say that would probably be one. I would, I would say to, would be to if you're going to be working with adolescent changing voices would be to do some do some reading. But maybe alongside that, or maybe before that to get in contact with someone like yourself or myself and just ask for a time for a cup of coffee or quick chat on the phone. And you'd be surprised what thirty to forty minutes of chatting back and forth, and questions that might be on the young person's, the young conductors mind. Asking those questions

and getting answers to them and how that can, you know, get straight to the straight to the point, and you're not sifting through Cooksey charts and stuff like that!

Brian: I'm not putting words in your mouth now, correct me if I'm but I think you're really describing someone that's really proactive, and it's not afraid to kind of get out there and contact people and go back to your primary school choir and kind of roll up the sleeves and just be proactive. Is that kind of what you're saying ?

Harry: Yeah. Well, that would be the that would be the first step. But on the second step is you like the first step is just learn on the job and you will learn a lot. You got to, you got to build up. Things have to happen for you to have experiences. You know, and experience is what is what you know. They say experience comes with time, but you've got to just do things, have experience. You've got to have experiences to have experience, you know. And the second thing is more, it's more about knowledge. And yes, so much, so many things online now. And I would definitely be encouraging people to read up. But what I'm saying is a conversation, you know, a forty-minute conversation over a cup of coffee or on the phone with somebody who, you, who, you know already, works with adolescent, changing voices that might be as valuable to you than reading a couple of textbooks that might be just a little bit dry and out of context, some of them, depending on what you find. And but I would say that would be, the second thing is, is the knowledge side of it. I don't. Did you ask me for three things, or was it just a few things.

Brian: Oh, no, just yeah, that's enough. That's totally fine.

Harry: Okay.

Brian: And I might move on. What I have next is kind of a few quickfire questions, and some of them you've kind of answered already in detail, so some of them we mightn't dwell too much on, but even just kind of like a quick answer, and kind of roughly what your approaches are. So, the first one is repertoire selection. I know you've talked a bit about that already, but anything you want to add about repertoire selection. What kind of rep are you looking for?

Harry: Yeah, I think the vocal range is the biggest thing for me when you're selecting repertoire for changing voices. So, I think that's the that's the key thing. And for me, if you have the ability, I'd much rather more vocal lines than less. So, for cambiata voices, I would have insisted, well, my own system of choosing I would have been looking for three part minimum, four part mostly. What tends to happen with four part, and that was all TTBB, that that group was all TTBB, so it's not your typical kind of setup. But even with the youth choir and DYC, I'm sure the same that the kinds of singers that you would have in your older choirs there, your older teenage choirs. I'm very happy to pick tenor one, tenor two, baritone, bass selections if we have the numbers, because what tends to happen is when you get that kind of writing, the ranges drop from being, say, an octave, and a third or an octave, and a fourth as a, as a broad tenor part, if it was two parts. And they can squeeze down into kind of maybe octaves, or perhaps even down, sometimes as close as a sixth, because everybody is kind of in their own little kind of section from tenor one, tenor, baritone bass down. Doesn't always happen like that of course, there's going to be a little bit of crossover every now and again. But yeah, so I often think I so range for me is the big thing. And yeah, that would be it. Yeah.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. Assigning appropriate voice parts? So, if a new singer comes into your choir, or you have a singer in a different choir that's moving up to another choir, what do you do to assign them to voice parts? What are you looking for? What kind of, do you do with them in order to find out what votes part they are, etc?

Harry: Yeah. So, I probably said, similar similarly enough to you, I think, I think I remember your demonstration in Dublin last year, but I listen to their speaking pitch first, and make a note of that. And then from that, I would ask them to sing down to their lowest comfortable pitch, and so bring them down kind of semitone by semitone, mainly through a kind of descending, say five note scale, where you know, and they kind of have a chance to be able to sing down into that rather than just bring them straight down to their lowest note, so it can, generally descending five note scale. So then I would take note of that, and then I try and bring them up to their highest comfortable, and their highest comfortable pitch. And again, it would be an exercise whatever, five note scale is fine. I tend not to do arpeggios, because you can get sometimes a little false sense of, they kind of, they sing in a certain and register for the lower notes, and then the upper note,

then, because it's a forth above, can be kind of separated in quality and in the way they approach it. So, I tend not to do arpeggios when I'm doing voice checks. So, it tends to be something kind of scalic or something like but not a full scale, a little pattern that they feel comfortable with. Sometimes there's a little bit of vocal coaching when it comes to going to the highest notes, because there can be tension there, and it's inhibiting the kind of real potential of what their voice is doing. So, you tend to spend a little bit more time on the high note, just to get a real sense of what's happening with the voice. And then, once I have a sense of all those three things, the speaking pitch, the lowest note and the highest note, I would make a judgment then, on what's the best voice part for them, and tending not to kind of push too much on the on the higher notes. If they have capability, like to say sing, say, let's say an F, an F4 is it? F above middle C? F5 is it?

Brian: F5, its F5 yeah.

Harry: F5. Yeah, you say they have ability to sing an F5, but their lowest note is an E flat or something like that. Well, they could by stretching tenor two, but that would be nonsensical, and they could happily sing baritone, but maybe, you know, there was kind of a hint of falsetto, or something at the top. So, I tend to, kind of, if the balancing of the choir allows to leave them seeing the lowest voice type that they're capable of. That's the one that they'll be most comfortable in. But in that instance, if there was a lack of baritones. I might consider that voice type to be a part.

Brian: One thing now is that I have to go on another meeting in ten minutes. So, I might if that's okay?

Harry: Go. I'd be quicker!

Brian: The next thing I'd love to hear about is teaching young males vocal technique. And one of the things obviously, I said to you earlier I'm interested in is, are there any instances where you're also their singing teacher as well as their conductor? And maybe some what you think of that is it? Is it a beneficial thing? Do you find to know them, one on one, and then work with them in the choral context?

Harry: Yeah, I really enjoy that. I do. I do it a loss. I've never had an issue with this. I probably yeah, I think I think it's beneficial. They're quite separate things in a way, I don't tend to draw too much on what I do in the voice lesson. I don't feel like I have any more of a kind of special relationship in the choir setting. I don't try and you know single people out like my students.

Brian: Do you use similar language in your teaching? You know one on one and your choir?

Harry: Yeah, there, there's definitely crossover. What I find in the teaching, though, is that I'm able to go a lot more in depth. Because yeah, because they're training their voice on a kind of one-to-one basis. You have to be a little bit more general in your choral conducting about, you know the kind of vocal technique terminology that you're using. But in the singing lessons, and you can get a lot more detailed. So yeah, there is a crossover, for sure, but I think the people who come to the lessons just benefit from a bit more information than you would get in choir. And also, you're able to kind of focus in on that one person's voice. So that's you know, that's really the main thing for them , that you you're not critiquing a collective, as you would in choir, you're able to completely hone in on what the needs and the yeah, the things that that voice kind of maybe need at that particular, on that particular day or that particular time. So yeah.

Brian: Fantastic. One other thing I'd love to hear your opinion on is the idea of mentorship and role models within your choirs, and they can be obviously role models, you know, socially, but also vocally. And so in your in your choirs, do you use a mentorship kind of system? Maybe where the older singers will welcome and help out the younger singers?

Harry: We don't have anything. We don't have anything formal in place, although we have absolutely been discussing that of late. We in the youth choir, which is the fourth to sixth year choir, and a little bit in the boys' core as well, we would have a chat at the start of the year with the oldest year group in those choirs, particularly in the youth choir, because it's kind of their last year in the choral programme. There is a an [named adult choir] that you they can avail of if they want to. But this tends to be their last kind of

official time in the kind of in the youth side of it, anyway, of the choral programme. So, we have a chat with them about giving, about making this last year a really fruitful one and worthwhile one. We want them to lead by example in that way. And I would remind them every now and again of that I think to a point we feel that's sufficient. And it's not about in being a leader. We feel it's not about telling people between member to member, you know, you should be doing this and stuff like that. We don't necessarily want leaders in inside in the group kind of barking orders or giving out, and not that they would anyway, I don't think. But we're not trying to instil that so much, as you know the fourth years come in, It's their first time in the youth choir. Really show them how to do it. I guess maybe a nice anecdote which might kind of show how that can happen is There is a singer called John Elwes, and he's a famous baroque singer. He's from Carrick an Suir originally from Carrick an Suir, and he was an orphan, and the nuns recognised he had a beautiful voice, so they sent him to Westminster Cathedral, where he became the head chorister, and Benjamin Britten wrote the Corpus Christi Carol for him. And he has a record of him singing with Benjamin Britten playing piano. So, I went to him for some private lessons for a time, and he asked me, 'well, what you want to learn?' I said, well, 'I desperately want to learn some technique', and he said, 'well, I'm sorry I'm not going to be able to teach any', and I was kind of 'what do you mean like this?'. 'You're like one of the best baroque singers in the world', I was thinking in my head, he said. 'Look, I went to Westminster when I was young. I basically sat in the choir and listened to the other singers, and I just did what they did. I don't even know how I do it. I just did what they did.' And yeah, there, yeah, yeah. and this, that's kind of what happens or can happen in choir is that you know, if there's good enough singing going on around you and behind you, and so on, you can take that on board by osmosis also, of course, by direction from the front and advice from the front, but you can't help, I don't think, learn from peer to peer as well.

Brian: Fantastic. Okay, so the last section, we've got two minutes to do this now. So, we'll get this done very quickly. So, for the final part of the interview, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing. So perhaps if we could hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, what's working and what's not working

broadly? So, this does not necessarily apply to your choir, it's boys singing in Ireland in general. So maybe just two min on where you see it.

Harry: I think unfortunately, it's not probably in a in a fantastic place. I think there are hubs of excellence around. I think Dublin Youth Choir is chief among them. I think we're trying to do our bit here in [named area], but it's just, it's not really, it's not, it's not enough, It's not sufficient, and I think there's too much of a disparity between the numbers of girls who will sing and boys who will sing I think it needs an awareness campaign or some sort of intervention that is backed with some serious resources, both staff and money. And to try to turn around those numbers, I just think it's not, it's not enough, I think. I hope I hope your study gets into the meat and drink of why we are at least touches on why, socially it happens the way it does. Internationally, it's an issue. So, I know it's not a problem specific to Ireland. And but yeah, I wouldn't be. I wouldn't feel that we're at the point where we're as good as it can be. I think we're. We're a good bit away from that.

Brian: Okay, listen, Harry. Thank you so much for being here today. I think I could listen to you all day! We could probably go on for hours and hours and hours! But I really appreciate you coming along and giving your thoughts today.

Harry: Not all, Brian. It's a pleasure. Thanks a million for all your work on it and looking forward to hearing more about it when it's all finished.

Brian: Fantastic.

Appendix L
Interview Transcript – Ian

Brian: Good evening, Ian, and thank you so much for joining me today. And I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male, adolescent voice change. So, to begin with. Let's begin by looking at your own choral background. Can you tell me a little bit about your own experiences growing up and your experience of voice change.

Ian: Yeah, I grew up in the Church of Ireland, and my father was a [named profession], so I grew up around congregational singing which started my journey into singing, and I don't really remember life as a consequence, without singing and congregational singing every week, and without fail, which led me to want to sing more, and I joined an all-boys choir in [named area], was called the [named choir], and that sparked a real love for singing, and I stayed there, and grew as a young musician, and led me into instruments such as piano and trumpet and musicianship and theory lessons. And then I sang in secondary school choirs, and in other church choirs as well. So I was quite immersed in choirs at a young age, for all of my life.

Brian: And do you remember your voice change happening as a thing?

Ian: I do. Yeah, I was about twelve or thirteen, and my voice change happened whilst I was at the beginning of secondary school, the end of primary school that kind of period in, and I remember moving to the alto line in the cathedral in [named area], and then soon moving to the tenor line, and then to more of a baritone voice line by the end of that transition , at the end of the initial move, and it that was over the course, probably actually only of about six months. I moved from being, I remember I sang the once in Royal David City solo, and then that heralded and moved down to the altos for that year certainly felt like the last year I was going to be doing that, and then I moved to into bass in school choir, and then join things like the Irish youth choir as a baritone.

Brian: So it sounds in that situation that there was a bit of a plan in place with that group or those groups that you started off singing 'Once in Royal David City' and then moved down to the alto and then moved to the tenor. So, there was a plan there.

Ian: I think the pattern was simply that I couldn't reach the high notes in the soprano line anymore. And I couldn't reach that, so things felt funny, so they just kept moving me until I was comfortable. I think it was nothing more formal, but also nothing more stressful than that.

Brian: Yeah, and just in terms of your professional background in choral conducting, would it be possible to talk a little bit about your formal education in choral conducting, and as part of that, the elements of voice change that may have been mentioned in that formal training.

Ian: Yeah, so I started my formal training. When I was in my undergraduate I started attending what was then called the AOIC conducting courses during the year, during the academic year, and you could go to these classes on a weekend, and I studied with [named teacher] in these beginners classes, and then I went to the summer conducting school in University of Limerick, hosted by what is now called Sing Ireland, and that started my formal, more serious studies in choir conducting. I also conducted choirs during my undergraduate degree, and during this whole time that was more focusing on conducting technique rather than la Voce and yourself as the teacher of the voice as well. But interestingly, I guess I was studying the voice through that whole period as my instrument at university rather than choir conducting. So, I was learning about the voice throughout that period, so there was a nice alignment there. But then, for my master's level, I did go and study conducting in [named college] there, where I studied with [named teachers], and there we studied the voices in like a kind of class context, and how the voice works. And we did speak to the idea of the changing voice, and they even set up links with the [a national youth choir], for us as students to be kind of student conductors on their residential courses, in [named area] and there we were linked, I was linked with the kind of the youth choir which would have had only changing voices in the tenor and bass section. And I worked with [named conductor] the conductor to, kind of, I watched him work with them, and how he kind of handled and managed their voices, and yeah,

that was part of my formal studies. I've also done the Estill vocal courses level one and two which speak a little bit to the changing voice, but not a tremendous amount. And my work with [a national choir], that isn't in a studious context, has also shown and seen me working with and changed voices in a professional capacity as well.

Brian: Great and with the master's degree that you did in [named area] and links that were created through that, did you find them effective? Was it a really useful thing to do?

Ian: Oh, yeah, it was very, very wonderful to be in just absorbing everything and seeing how those voices work, I mean as a guy myself. I did go through it. So, I have a very strong personal experience alongside all my peers that I was singing beside going through the same thing. So, I feel like it's not an unfamiliar territory to me, because I've literally journeyed it. And I've lived experience of that change. And so, it's not something that I was ever like scared of, etc. Because I think I didn't have any sort of bad experience around the time other than, of course, I really liked my boy soprano voice, and I actually wonder whether that was my finest vocal period!

Brian: That's all great. And just before I move on, is there any other kind of specific training that you've had in in relation to boys changing voices? Any kind of courses you've done, or anything else?

Ian: Yeah, I did a over the Covid period. I did an online course with Jenevora Williams which spoke to working with young voices, and she spoke a lot on the changing voice during that online course where I learned a little bit more.

Brian: Great fantastic. So, the next thing I was hoping to talk about is professional practices. The first thing I'd love to talk about is, can you share the specific choirs that you've worked with, which contain adolescent boys over the years past and present.

Ian: Absolutely. I think I could probably start off by even at university. The voices are still changing, and I worked with SATB choirs at university, and an all-male acapella group actually, and there would have been eighteen-year-old boys in that. And now, as I'm a bit older, I guess I recognise that those voices were very much still changing and

settling during that period. But, you know, interestingly, I think we were all extremely adaptable. This was a student-led ensemble that I helped to lead, and we would all just kind of look out for each other and sing the lines that we could sing and not sing the lines that we couldn't sing. And that kind of flexibility and adaptability is how it worked. And maybe that's a great motto for life, you know, if something's not working, just change it up until it works for you, you know. And I think that was really nice. And as a team being flexible as a team and working as a team to make sure the team shines. And so that was my first experience, I guess, in an all-male acapella group and SATB choirs at university. I also worked quite specifically with that kind of younger teenager that are really just going through the recent vocal change. First time, probably with the [a national youth choir], where I worked on they have, what they call a cambiata choir, and I was the section leader with them in my early twenties, and that was wonderful. Those young boys were about fourteen to seventeen or something like that, really quite young, they must have been between thirteen and fifteen, I imagine. And yeah, that was great. I also work at the [named choral music education programme], as their chorus director, that have a changing voice choir, they call it, and that's led by [named conductor], but I also bring those work with those boys, because I take the upper voices choir, and we come together to perform SATB repertoire, and I work closely with their coach, and their conductor. And then I actually conduct that ensemble when they come together, and which has given me experience again working with the changing voice. I also conduct the [a national youth choir], and there I obviously work with [named age range] changing voices, which is great, too. At [named youth choir], which I'm the artistic director of, I have, this is an upper voice choir, and we when the voices change in this organisation, we herald point the changing voices in new directions. Mostly, however, at the moment we have two countertenors with us, two boys that seemed particularly agile, and like, their voices, seem safe to be singing countertenor, and they we have a vocal coach that they work closely with. And we they, the changing voices, countertenor boys, get like bi-weekly lessons with them every two weeks they get a lesson with [named teacher], our vocal coach just to check in on the voice, and that's really special experience for them. And those boys will probably be going for Oxbridge scholarships, and where there are opportunities for countertenors. So, it's nice to see that journey.

Brian: In relation to some of the choirs that you mentioned, that have adolescent boys. What were the specific tasks and responsibilities that you have or have had with those groups?

Ian: In relation to voice change, it's to just make sure that we're looking after their voices, and we're nurturing the voices. That's my responsibility. We're encouraging those voices to flourish and to grow, and to keep an eye on them. And yeah, I'm kind of in charge of the vocal development of all of the singers under my remit. So, I guess that's very individualised. According to every child's needs, and for changing voices in particular, and we keep a closer eye on them. As I mentioned in [named youth choir], we see the boys with changing voices, and the boys more generally a lot more, just because their vocal folds are changing more during those years. And in all of the organisations I work for, we also have a vocal specialist. So that's usually a professional singer, and also somebody who also teaches and who specialises in young voices and across all the organisations that I work for, it's a great privilege to be in. So, I'm a chorus director, and it is. It is, of course my responsibility to look after their voices. But the specialised care of the voices and all the fantastic work that happens there happens actually outside of the general chorus room and in small practice rooms with these specialised teachers, which is wonderful.

Brian: Great, and in terms of like these organisations that you work with, every organisation is going to be slightly different and do things in different ways and in terms of gaps that you found you might have had in your knowledge when you joined these organisations. What did you have to know, and what did you have to learn? Maybe give a few examples of different organisations where you where you go into them, and you had to learn, maybe something different about adolescent, changing voices.

Ian: Believe it or not. I find they all work very, very similarly in that they just listen to the child's voice, see where it's at, and respond accordingly. I mean, I think that is a motto is and they don't push the limits. They just work with the voice where it's at. And they definitely encourage gentle exploration and to have fun with one's voice still. But across them all, much like my own upbringing, referencing back to the beginning of our interview. 'Oh, we can't do that anymore, we'll get move away'. And that's okay. And

we change. Oh, we found an area. And let's play in this area. Let's have a play in this area. How's the voice working? And never doing huge pushing exercise, you know, and stressful exercise? But we don't do that anyway, with any of our children. So in many senses, there is no change to the professional practice. One listens to the child's voice, and one responds and encourages them to play and to expand their horizons to try new things, but nothing that could kind of hurt the voice, which is actually the same as any child that we're working with.

Brian: Yeah. So, there's no organisation you went into where you're kind of. Oh, what's going on here? This is totally different.

Ian: Oh, no. All of that is extremely similar. Yeah.

Brian: Great. Yeah. So, I might move on to the next section, which is challenges and successes. So maybe if we could start with some challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change, you know, across all of your organisations what maybe a few challenges that you found.

Ian: The only challenge I can really think of is sometimes the changing voices boys, in order to get a particularly a note higher in their registers, they really push the voice too hard. They kind of push forward into like a shot, almost like the vocal folds, meet in the same way, as like a really spread, airy, shouting quality. Which they sort of. There seems to be a natural tendency to do that, which I have heard can be you know, on a first-time basis can damage the voice, and their voices can tire easy with this like a lot of excessive air flow through the folds. And yeah, that's what I've heard on a kind of day-to-day practical front, so encouraging them to kind of lighten on the top, only sing with it what they can sing and listen to their own bodies, etc.

Brian: Any other non-vocal challenges?
Ian: Social challenges. Yeah, they can be a little bit shy about their new voices, particularly at the beginning of the change, and sometimes some boys who voices are changing late need to stay with all the girls in choir, and that can be a social challenge that boys like to be with boys. But you're the last soprano boy soprano to change, and

you're stuck in the girl's section. So that's almost the other way around, isn't it? And also, I definitely noticed some boys really grieve the loss of their own, of their old voice, like, there's like a grieving process, and I've experienced that as well and on a personal note, and I know some boys find that harder to move on.

Brian: Yeah, the boy soloist is revered, you know, for years. And then suddenly, they don't have the voice. Yeah, interesting.

Ian: Yeah, yeah.

Brian: And in terms of success stories or positive moments that you've had, and over the years with boys going through voice change, if you'd be able to maybe share a couple of personal success moments that you've had. I'm sorry I should have phrased that better. The personal stories that you have had as a conductor working with boys going through voice change?

Ian: No, I just have seen a lot of boys come out the go through it all and settle nicely into their new voice. I don't think there's really one standout. I mean, I do have one student, [named singer], but he's actually a counter tenor, and he is now going to [named school] on a full scholarship to study music and being a countertenor in his new voice, I remember when his voice was high. I mean, it's still high, but it's a different type of high, isn't it? So that's a nice success story to have kind of nurtured a young person to go to do their A Levels in a prestigious music secondary school, you know.

Brian: Wow! Brilliant.

Ian: Yeah, it is brilliant.

Brian: Any other before I move on challenges or successes that you can think of in your time as a conductor with boys.

Ian: Yeah, and challenges. No, I think there is kind of an awkwardness in. I'm thinking of [named choir]. There's an awkwardness and a shyness around their new voices as a

section, they're less forthcoming. And actually in [named choir] a challenge is that the girls the same age as them, are their voices already coming into their own, and then the changed voices aren't. So sometimes whenever we join those choirs together, the changed voices, choir and the upper voices, you've got, you know, a fifteen-year-old girl whose voice is really getting going, and then the fifteen-year-old boys just become really insecure because their voice is in a real place of change. And whilst they used to be in the upper voice choir and be right there with those girls loving it now all of a sudden, they're like the worst in the class. So that that's a challenge socially. And then their voices become less forthcoming in the rehearsals because they're like 'oh, my voice isn't as good as it was'. But they are brilliant, you know.

Brian: Yeah, that's fantastic. Thanks very much for that. So, the next section is, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you perceive to be the key qualities of effective conductors working with young male singers, and to start with, what in your view, are the traits or skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change.

Ian: The traits and skills I thin, a good trait is, and skill is listening to the young person and listening to their voice, listening to where they're at and having a knowledge of how to respond to that and how to help improve that. And I think that's basically the most important thing. I think you need to have a solid grounding in understanding the voice, and how the voice works as a skill in order to help that young person during that period. So, having done qualifications and study around how to sing well and how to support young singers specifically. And yeah, I think that's they're the top traits, listening, and actually how to hear what's going on and how to respond to that.

Brian: That's fantastic. And what advice would you have for new or aspiring conductors in this field?
Ian: Oh, just see! Go and see as much as you can, and ask people loads of questions for young conductors, ask everybody everything and what they know. Be inquisitive to all the professionals working in the industry. And have a questioning eye and ear over the practices that you're seeing as well, and don't be afraid to question things and to explore that, and also be flexible. I think a huge thing is that it's not black and white. The

knowledge that this particular skill set is not a black and white one. It's not like, 'if you do this, you'll get this', because you're working with humans, and you get different results from every human. So, seeing one thing might work for someone might not work for someone else, and that kind of flexibility. And so, it's not like, 'oh, I can go and qualify myself, and then I can do that forever'. That's not how it works, because you're working with humans, and it's an art form as well as a mechanical science, you know, and everything. And it's where the great mystery of life is where art meets science and all of that. And this is truly where that happens, it's quite interesting.

Brian: Yeah, love that answer. It's brilliant, really, really good. So, related to this, I kind of have a few questions I'd like to ask you just kind of more direct questions, if that's okay? So how would you approach the following aspects of the job? And the first one is repertoire selection in relation to changing voices.

Ian: Yeah how do I approach it? I, again much like the, a young conductor question, I beg, borrow, and steal, and I ask questions from other people that work in the industry. What has worked well? That's a huge thing. I guess that word of mouth that reaching out to people being engaged in the community to see, and which composers are writing great music, which publishers are publishing great music, and going from there. And finding appropriate repertoire. My main thing for sourcing repertoire, which I think was the origin of this question, is asking all my amazing colleagues, and even reaching out to people on social media platforms and via email via their websites asking for a perusal score, and then also having the flexibility to change those scores for these ensembles. The child's safety comes first, not the composer's notes. So, if a note isn't working, for a particular child in a particular song with where their voice is at on its journey, I will change that note. And that's the priority, the physical safety of the child over a composer's original score. And that's kind of bottom line for me.

Brian: My next question is kind of related to that, like I was going to ask in relation to repertoire. What's in a good score? What are you looking for in a score? And when you're thinking about changing voices, for example, I saw you know recently in in your [a national youth choir], you picked some SAB music. And I'm sure you did that on

purpose? You know, because you're working with young voices. Maybe you could talk a bit about that, and what are you looking for in scores?

Ian: Yeah, those, the SAB scores are quite useful, and if you're playing at a longer concert, you don't want the tenors singing proper high tenor stuff the whole concert. So those SA Baritone songs are great because it gives those changing voices just a moment to sit in the kind of the middle of their register, even for the bases on the lower end, it can be quite low for a changing voice to be always singing down so in a choir with changing voices in it, I always try and have one or two SAB moments where they can kind of sing in the middle of their register. And we're not pushing the extremities for the entire gig. And yeah, that's what I would speak to that moment. Sorry. What was the original question?

Brian: And so, you're obviously very aware of these?

Ian: Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Brian: Like, I suppose, the other things in repertoire, obviously like the range and tessitura are very important in it. Anything else you are looking for, that sits well with young adolescent males?

Ian: Yeah, I mean, I think there's something around line and flow as well. Things, not those kind of like I avoid almost anything that would encourage shouty sound. No, I like those lovely folk songs with a line for the changing voices, and where you just, you know, flow from vowel to vowel, I think they work really, really nicely for them, artistically as well. It comes across really beautiful in the audience, you know. I think it really helps their voices shine. So yeah, folk song can really be quite nice during that period.

Brian: And just going back to the concert that I obviously saw recently. There's a few of the pieces that gave the tenors and basses together a chance to sing solo, you know. So that be something that's important to you then, obviously, is it?

Ian: Oh, yeah, yeah, definitely a moment for their changing voices to hold the melody and stuff is really nice, because actually, it is the most beautiful sound. A young fifteen-year-old, changed voice, changing voice, you know, it's, really, really special. So there are some songs where sopranos and altos are being the backing singers, and they come through in the texture, and that's lovely.

Brian: And do you think that's important for keeping them singing? You know, to give them the chance at the melody? So not just singing oohs and ahs, etc.

Ian: Yeah, I think that's really important. Yeah, they're not just the backing vocalists forever. And I mean that's what's great about these changing voices ensembles more broadly, is that they're all at the fore of that, and a lot of those changing voices repertoire, it just spreads melody across all the different voice types, tenor one down to bass two, which is lovely.

Brian: And how do you approach assigning appropriate voice parts for boys going through voice change?

Ian: We hear their voices more often across all the organisations I work with, and so we change what section they're in without delay, as in when voices change. And if that means the young people need to learn new music and learn new lines, that's a wonderful musicianship opportunity for them. And we see that as a learning opportunity, or, you know, a harmony, learning, opportunity exercise, which adds to their music, education, experience with us.

Brian: And again, it's vocal health over voicings.

Ian: Totally.

Brian: And how do you approach retention of young male singers across your choirs? What are the important aspects that a conductor needs to, or traits or skills that a conductor needs to have to retain boys.

Ian: I think it's helpful that I am a male, because I very much believe in that motto you can't be who you can't see. And so, for them, having a male up the front who's singing in a lower octave, there's a relatability to that which definitely helps, I think, socially. And then, on the note of social, you know, most people are coming to choir for yes, absolutely the musical experience, but for that social community experience as well where they meet other people who like to sing. So that social aspect is key and having lots of people building momentum, so you have plenty of people who have changing voices in your group, are what keeps that momentum going. What we don't have at [named choir] is enough, boys passing through to maintain that. So, we actually, as a town, we have the conductors have met, and we just do one offering in one of the churches where they do. We kind of send all our boys there and then they're off together in that one church thing, and away they go. But just because it's a small town, we don't have enough interest there to have it within our one little charity which is called [named choir].

Brian: Okay, brilliant, fantastic. And how do you approach teaching young males, vocal technique?

Ian: Much the same as how their upper voices were done. But so, they'll have been with me when their voice was higher and everything remains the same apart from the ranges. But good singing is good, singing is good, singing. Good technique is good, technique is good technique. And we are probably quite vigilant with the changing voices as to not cause harm. And we're very watch doggy about pushing. We're probably slightly less experimental with regards to our fifteen-year-old sopranos, we're really encouraging them to explore their range. This is the girls and others. We're really exploring their height and whatnot. We probably don't extend that exploration as far with the changing voices. And yeah, but the same things apply.

Brian: Yeah, yeah, excellent and how do you do you teach any kind of vocal anatomy with the boys?

Ian: We do. We do very basic, just the basic principles. But yeah, there would be. There would definitely be some understanding of, for example, how the folds meet. What's happening. Yeah. With regard to anatomy, yep.

Brian: Great. And what's your views like on the importance of, say, mentorship and obviously being, I know you mentioned it earlier, being a good vocal role model?

Ian: Yeah, we have, I guess our sixth years, our levers year across all the organisations that I work for are in held in high regard, and are given special duties and given special things, to look after the younger years. We meet in [named choir] in [named areas]. The sixth years, we have these meetings before we talk about how we want our organisation to look, we bring them into the leadership side of things so that they can set the tone and set the example of excellence that we're looking for and that goes for the changing voices choir as well.

Brian: Brilliant. They're fantastic answers Ian. Thanks, thanks very much. So, I'm going to move on to the final section of the interview, and in this section, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys singing in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male participation in choral singing going? And to start with, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland?

Ian: My thoughts are that there's not a huge male voice singing culture in Ireland at all. I would say. It's very, very small, and it's a very niche activity for boys to want to do. There are certain pockets throughout the country that have communities where it is taking place, and there's certainly pockets of absolute excellence, It's wonderful. But also, I've come from a choral background, but I must also recognise that there are other types of singing that are happening that are encouraging boys, in bands, and all of that. I'm in a very privileged position where I work with the [a national youth choir], which brings together the very few boys that do love to sing in choirs, and it brings them under one roof. So, I've seen such amazing talent from across the country come together for a week, which is lovely.

Brian: Yeah. And one thing you mentioned there, I think, is interesting is that in Ireland, like boys do love to sing, but not necessarily always in a choral context. Is there any way that we can bridge the two a little bit more, to get more boys singing, in the choral context?

Ian: Oh, I mean, I think so. I think the school singing culture would be great, and providing opportunities for boys to maybe get together to sing in just boys events much like, for example, it's my understanding that 'only boys allowed' in Wales just bring boys from across every town together for these big singing events in Cardiff and whatnot at the end of the year, and I think we could easily achieve something quite similarly simply providing a resource for boys to learn music and provide a performance opportunity for that. I genuinely think it's as easy of that. If the resource is excellent, you know.

Brian: Yeah, yeah. And just final thoughts on youth choral music in Ireland, and how it relates to boys singing like, what's working in Ireland. And what's not working, do you think.

Ian: The pockets of excellence are unbelievably amazing. There are organisations in most of the main cities of Ireland doing great voice singing work, and that's working. And all these amazing practitioners just doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. That's working well. But maybe what's not working so well is the broader culture of a stigma around male voice singing in Ireland. The culture more broadly doesn't see men as singing people, but more as sporty people, and that's encouraged, particularly in the more regional communities that's more prevalent as well. So, change to what it what it is to be a man, and more broadly, is wonderful. But what's working well.

Ian: What would be great, I think, is like more of a centralised offering, whereby every school could simply sign up for a changing voices, male voice singing programme for free and, I think it's always nice, isn't it, in any kind of music thing to work towards an event, a performance which can be really nice. So, to provide a performance opportunity for those who do sign up would be really special as well.

Brian: And kind of related to this like, what? What do you think? If you could change one thing in relation to how we're getting the message across about voice change in Ireland. What would you do if you could do one thing to really sell? The idea of voice change in Ireland? What could we do?

Ian: I think it goes back to that original saying, if you can't be what you can't see. So, there's something around visibility, and maybe just highlighting a campaign of visibility around like a social media campaign, maybe something huge like that that showed Irish boys singing and provided them an opportunity to join in. Yeah, like, make some form of video that the masses could see. And in that video have a link to joining a similar event near you, or not even near you. But you know, once a year there's going to be an event, because even a once off experience can encourage people for the rest of their lives. You know.

Brian: Brilliant. And one last thing is like, if we could do one thing to get the message about voice change in in like the actual like, what is voice change, and have as many people know about it as possible. Do you have any ideas on what we could do?

Ian: You want to get a message across?

Brian: The more technical element of voice change in terms of getting as many because a lot of people don't seem to know about voice change.

Ian: All right, I mean, yeah, yeah, you could perhaps add it to the curriculum at the at the appropriate age. Yeah. So, I remember in primary school receiving sex ed, for example, class one day, and for it maybe to be aligned in maybe a less stigmatised version, because that's quite an overwhelming topic, sex education. But the voice change on puberty could just be taught better in maybe in sixth class, or in the beginning of secondary school. And so that they truly understand. So yeah, part of the education system, they learn about that change in a very real way.
Brian: Fantastic, Ian brilliant. Anything else you want to add before I end the interview.

Ian: Not at all, not at all.

Brian: Absolutely fantastic.

Appendix M
Interview Transcript – Jenna

Brian: Okay, so good morning, Jenna, and thank you for joining me today. I'd like to welcome you to this interview. The official part of our discussion has now begun, and I look forward to learning more about your thoughts and insights on male, adolescent voice change. So, the first section we're going to look at is background. And to start with looking at your own choral background, can you tell me a bit about your experiences growing up and your experience of being a younger singer, and then developing your voice as you, as you got older?

Jenna: Yeah. So, I guess, I always kind of sang, I guess, whether that was like in school or in church choirs. So, I think, God, if I try to remember like when even when that was like, I guess we were brought up in like the church group, in the various different choirs. So, I think I'm trying to think when maybe from when I was about six or seven, the whole family were involved in the church group in like, say in [named area]. And then at some point we decided to. We moved to churches, but then I was like the whole way through primary school, I would have sang whether it was with that one or the we moved across to the church in [named area], and that one kind of had more of a children's choir at that point, and we also kind of played tin whistle like it was kind of a really kind of like random setup. But we would like sing, and we'd go out into the community and like at Christmas time we'd sing in the, the oh, my God, my brain, the old like a residential kind of retirement, kind of nursing home. There's the words Nursing Home. And yeah. So that was kind of all the way through primary school. So, I think I had a really good relationship with singing just really enjoyed it. But it was always kind of attached to the church? And I guess I kind of yeah, the Catholic Church. I guess if that's any, get that specificity is helpful for context. And then I guess, because I was also like playing piano. My mum was aware of like wanting to make sure that wherever I went to school, kind of had kind of music and a good system in place. There was a moment where I almost went to [named school], because again my mum was aware of choir. So, I guess there was enough of that happening to where she thought that that was something that would be something that I wanted to do. Yeah, I think I just loved mass, I loved like singing at mass up to that point, and I ended up not going to there, but went to [named school]

which had, like a really great tradition of choral singing, and they had at that point like been winning competitions at the Cork Choral Festival. Like over many, many years. They had a wonderful choir leader there, [named teacher], but she really like had this hold on choral music in the school, and there was like a past people's choir that, like people really went back to for years and years because of the strength of the program there. So, for me, in all the way through secondary school there was compulsory choir from first, second and third year, and so we would have it just timetabled into our lessons. But it also like was taken quite seriously. So, it wasn't like, I guess, like it was. We were singing SSA rep straight away from first year. We had, we did the choir competition, not choir competitions, choir exams. So, we would have an examiner come in every year on that front all the way through, and then once we got to transition year, then it was an auditioned choir. And so our senior choir was, it met for three lunch times a week, so like kind of over the course of the week, it was like an hour and a half of choir, and then through that we would have Christmas concerts, summer concerts, and that was like singing things like, I guess if I think about when I was in Transition year, I sang Faure's Requiem. We did excerpts from Handel's Messiah, Vivaldi's Gloria in the summer, and so, quite like a serious choral programme all the way through to when I left school. And then I also had the opportunity. When I was in fifth year I sang with the [named school] choir, so I guess they had. They were in all boys school, and so, I guess from their point of view, having an SATB choir, they were using their trebles as their sopranos and altos, and they needed just a little bit more support from some more experienced singers, so they would bring in the girls from [named school] to just booster the treble voices alongside the tenors and basses of the older years. And so, with that we would have again got another opportunity then to sing Faure's Requiem with them, with orchestra, and also would have gone to things like Feis Ceoil and the Wesley Interschools competition with them, seeing kind of all sorts of kind of repertoire. So that was kind of like the choral experience through kind of primary into secondary school. I then, I guess, because of that.

Brian: I think we will probably pause it there for the moment. Is that okay? What I was going to say is that thanks so much for all that background. The nature of this interview from now on is going to be specifically about voice change. So, all of the questions that I ask are going to be from kind of a voice change lens if that makes sense. But it's great to

hear your background. So obviously, you came from a lot of a lot of a real musical background, you know, and grew up with.

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: Yeah, fantastic. So, the next thing I'm going to ask you is about your professional background in choral conducting. And what kind of training you've done choral conducting. And within that training, what aspects did they talk about adolescent voice change? Or was there elements of training on adolescent's range within that training?

Jenna: Yeah, so my, I guess my first kind of conducting experience would have been during my [named music degree], and that was through [named college], which name has now changed. But that's what it was when I was there, and so we would have had conducting for I think it was just for one year, or maybe it was two, but we had, and it was mostly choral repertoire that we were looking at when we were kind of having those conducting lessons during the degree. We also had kind of a singing kind of aspect in year one, where we looked at a little bit about voice technique. But I'm trying to think my memory on it was that it wasn't particularly good, so I don't think I got much from that like when I when I look back on that kind of small module that we had in year one.

Brian: Not good? In what way? Just wondering, lacking in it in terms of, I suppose, in terms of like if you were sent into a school of boys going through voice, change what was lacking in the training.?

Jenna: I think we from what I remember anyway, we sang through material. But I don't think we specifically looked at anything from a vocal technique point of view. We didn't address anything kind of technique wise, and there was nothing that kind of specifically talked about the changing voice.

Jenna: Or I think the voice at all. I think it was very much about I guess, getting people singing and us singing as opposed to the more the specifics.

Brian: Critical listening skills, vocal technique etc were lacking?

Jenna: Yeah. And that was only provided for kind of one term in first year. And I think even at that point we were all just kind of getting to know each other. So, I don't know how much actually happened in that! But yeah. So then, I guess conducting was definitely a class that was more about gesture and, the physical act of conducting as opposed to the sounds that we were trying to elicit from our singers. From what again, all of this is like from what I remember, it was definitely a while ago. But yeah, from what I remember, it was definitely more about kind of entries and cutoffs and beating patterns as opposed to anything about the voice specifically. So that was, I guess if I think about my conducting training during kind of formal education, that was kind of what was provided.

Brian: That's leading on to my next question, actually, which is about any other courses that you did, and that would help you in terms of your work with changing voices? Or it could be days or online workshops, whatever.

Jenna: Yeah. So, I think after that, I kind of because of that training, I knew there was a distinct lack of, I was like, if I'm going into schools now, I definitely need more support for where I'm going. And so, immediately after graduating, I did the week-long conducting course, the AOIC as it was known then, the AOIC conducting course down in Limerick. So, it was kind of a week-long, conducting course. I guess I went in at like a level four, I'm trying to think, [named teacher] somebody, whoever was my kind of conducting teacher at that time, and he was like brilliant, lots of varied repertoire. But then also there was like various courses along like across the week, there was different, like guest lectures or guest hours, and with specialist topics. And within that I guess there was various bits like just like elements of things that you would take that you're like, 'yep, that will be applicable to kind of my practice'. And so that was. I guess, immediately before I started teaching, it was the summer before that. So that was kind of, I think, for me the most kind of directly like practical kind of thing, I guess, picking up lots of things around kind of warmups and the structure of the choral rehearsal and kind of repertoire selection. So, I think at that point, kind of lots of ideas around that I'm trying to think. Was there anything specific to the changing voice in that one? I'm not sure. But I definitely yeah have kind of maybe explored in other courses. I know Jenevora Williams does a course around teaching young voices, and so talks about voice change in the ages

that different things happen. But I kind of that one was actually, after I had finished kind of teaching in a context with changing voices. So, or well, I mean with young changing voices, anyway. And I did do that conducting course again a few summers later. And again, I'm not sure that there was ever much detail given on, on the change in male voice.

Brian: Yeah, that's really interesting. That's great. That's fantastic. Can I move on to the next section? Which is professional practices.

Jenna: Yep.

Brian: And this is kind of a section where, if you talk about the different professional practices, you know, that are required? So, the thing I'd like to start with is choirs that you've worked with past and present. Name some of the choirs, but also kind of what the voicings were. What kind of choirs they were? What levels? Yeah, that kind of thing.

Jenna: Yeah. So, I guess if I go back to yeah, when I was like teaching in secondary school in [named area], kind of an all-boys secondary school. So that was kind of my first kind of, I guess formal kind of choir experience. And when I started teaching in that school there was there was no, there was no kind of history of choral music in the school. There was definitely like, like under the umbrella of choir like it was, and it was more of the junior years that kind of were singing in it. They were singing kind of more pop music, and It didn't look like what I conceived of as to be a choir at that point in time, and in so much as like from what my experience of choir was to what was happening, I would have kind of considered it more of a like a jam group that was happening where they might sing kind of some songs. And yeah, it didn't reflect my view of choir at that point in time. And so, I was like in my mind, it was something that I wanted to be able to have within my professional practice? And so over time, I kind of it evolved into what would then become a senior choir, and which was I guess, voicings wise was TTBB, and that kind of grew out of the transition year musical. So, I guess, in terms of actually getting boys to sing. I know lots of people like talk about the challenges of like just encouraging or just being able to get boys to sing at all in the secondary school context can be challenging, especially when there isn't like a history of it and a precedent for it. And so, I knew that that was something that was going to be challenging to even just

establish from the from the outset. I think what definitely got it there was the musical as a platform into that. So I think I cajoled kind of a group of young lads into kind of saying, once they finished the musical, I was like, 'oh, if you want to keep singing like, come to X room on a Friday at this time, and we're going to sing some more, and we're just going to keep singing'. And that's what it was initially like. It was literally like, maybe every two or three weeks, whoever showed up in the room we would like sing a variety of repertoire. But again, in that, like TTBB voicing and just getting them going. And then I guess over time it evolved. Yeah.

Brian: Can I actually relate to this, what do what do you view like in terms of boy's perception of singing, when you compare musicals to choir? Do they view it as kind of two different types of singing, or like when they were in choir, did they view it as a different type of singing than being in a musical?

Jenna: Yes, yeah, I think I think because the musical is this whole like activity. It feels like it definitely is the way in or for me. Certainly, it was the way in for them to realise in a different environment that they enjoyed singing. That they that they were like 'oh, this is kind of fun'. 'Oh, I really like using my voice in this way. I want to keep doing this', and I'm not sure that they would have gotten like. If I had just said, 'oh, here's a choir sign up, they wouldn't have come'. And so, I think they needed that experience first to realise, actually they really enjoyed it. And there was other boys around that also enjoyed it. And actually, maybe those boys were cool, and maybe that was something that they could was socially acceptable to do.

Brian: And like the idea of like, obviously the end product being like quite spectacular, and a big event? You find that? Did that really give them? Did that give them a real encouragement to then be confident to be in a choir?

Jenna: Yeah, I think it was. There was definitely a level of camaraderie, like where they had kind of been working on this project over a period of six plus months together. They'd formed this bond around music making that maybe wasn't there before. And now it was like, 'oh, how do we get to keep doing this together?' So, I think it was definitely the level of camaraderie. The movement towards this like performance, goal and kind of

the feeling of excitement that came with like achieving that level of excellence. And getting to share that with people. And I think it really, I think for the boys that I worked with, it was definitely about that sense of like camaraderie that came with it. And I think they wanted to just be able to keep being in that environment of rehearsing and knowing that they could then go and like perform in other spaces. They were really keen then, over time like to compete. So, I think, even if I think about that first, like choir that I had, that became a little bit more like regular rehearsals. And I was like, 'okay, let's go to the competition'. And we went to [named choral festival]. I think that was within like maybe two years of being there, and they didn't place, and they did a workshop, and they thought it was all a bit mad, and they didn't really understand fully things yet. But they saw all these other choirs, and they were like 'jeez they were great, that's amazing'. And I think that then set like an expectation around what the standard could be. And then I think they then became motivated to work towards that standard. But I think the musical definitely like on an annual basis was like, okay, what? What students are going to find their way towards choir through this medium? And then I think once there was like once they would then see the senior choir would get to, they would perform at school masses. So, I think the younger years definitely then got to see them having these really beautiful performances in a in a public space like kind of in front of the whole school. It was kind of oh, I could be part of that, like the more it kind of grew.

Brian: Yeah.

Jenna: It then became something maybe a little bit more aspirational. But

Brian: Can I suggest that move on to the next question, because I think where you're going here will be probably in a later question, is that okay?

Jenna: Perfect. Yeah, absolutely.

Brian: Yeah. And the next thing I'd like to talk about are specifically your tasks and responsibilities. When you were working, inquire with these young singers? So, your task and responsibilities in relation to their voice change mainly.

Jenna: Okay. Em. I think in terms of voice change, I know that when I when I first started teaching, I think it was something that I didn't know enough about. And also, then in my mind I perceived them to be embarrassed about it. So, then I was embarrassed about it for them if that makes sense like, I just didn't want to bring it up. I didn't want to acknowledge it, because I didn't know what level of uncomfortability [*sic*] it was going to cause for them. And so, I think it was just something that like I didn't really talk about now. That might have been the first year or two, or I don't know what point my mind shifted with this, but I remember a distinct kind of moment where I was like actually my like responsibility or my role within that or task is to make them feel comfortable around us. And it's about creating that space where actually, we can just talk about it, and it is normal, and it is a thing that, like all boys, go through. And so, I think for me, it was definitely one of the, my tasks and responsibilities, was becoming comfortable in talking about it myself and normalising it. And so just kind of saying, yeah, like, if you're starting to notice a change, or like just having that conversation openly with them. To kind of say, yeah, your voice will change, and that might affect kind of, 'okay, right now you're singing on these lines, and these notes feel comfortable for you if you'. This is because, even though the TTB choir was happening, there was still a junior choir. There was maybe about ten of them in it, and they just loved to come and sing, and it wasn't particularly serious, but it, but it definitely was getting them singing, too. And yeah, I think at that point it was about kind of saying, if things start to change. Come and talk to me like it's totally normal, like, and just kind of even just checking in with how voices were feeling on a day like asking kind of for that feedback like is, does that feel like it's in a comfortable range? Is anything like hurting all of that and just kind of encouraging them to kind of, okay, yeah. At some points there was like lines that didn't quite fit in none of the none of the parts really worked for them. And so, they were kind of like, okay, if you want to sing that bit and then jump across just having that like flexibility, maybe with the younger singers.

Brian: Yeah. So in terms of responsibilities, would I be right in saying, kind of to summarise what you said. There is that to not make a massive deal about it like.

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: It's absolutely overwhelming kind of scary things that actually, you know, normalizing it and just creating and creating a kind of a vibe in the choir that it's okay to talk about it. Would that be kind of.

Jenna: Absolutely. Yeah. I think, yeah, that was definitely a huge one.

Brian: And the other thing you're saying is kind of like in terms of moving them around different voice parts. Explain that a bit more?

Jenna: Yeah, I think I guess, in the certainly in the Junior choir, where they might kind of start at the beginning of the year, and their voice hadn't started to change at all. And so, they're kind of, they've been placed, and they're like, 'yeah, I sing this part'. And I'm like, I'm singing these kind of outer lines or these soprano lines within the repertoire and then they've kind of been like, 'oh, I can't sing that note anymore' or today, my voice. And for some of them it might be like some days, yeah, that they were like kind of singing those more treble parts, and then all of a sudden, they were like, 'oh, today it's feeling a little bit low', and then I'll go back. And it was just kind of in that state of flux. And so, when they weren't quite able to figure out where it was going, it was kind of they might decide 'oh, yes, I'm going to sing this part because this is where I feel comfortable today'. So, it's kind of more just having that flexibility and then kind of feeding back on, and having maybe a little bit more autonomy around where they felt was comfortable. I think once it got to more of that like kind of fifteen to eighteen, where most of the boys at that point will have gone through voice change. I did have one student who went through voice change quite late. And so, he was like seventeen before kind of the voice started to change. And so, when we were having the TTB choir, that was kind of quite a difficult one to navigate, because I guess the repertoire was fixed by the fact that, like all the voices, have changed except for one. And so even, I mean, he was quite useful for the high tenor lines, because all of that was sitting in his lovely alto range. But then, yeah, there was kind of conversations to navigate with him, as that was kind of happening quite a bit later. But otherwise, like I guess in that fifteen to eighteen some of them would have started in choir as tenor one, and then they'll come back after Christmas, and all of a sudden, they're like, 'I've got bass notes', and so I think tasks, at that point, when I had the TTB choir was almost on a termly basis, I would just check in with range, and just see

where is the comfortable voice range sitting now, do you still feel like that part is appropriate? And so, some yeah, some students, one year they were singing tenor one, and next year they were singing bass two, depending on how the voice sat, and then others were kind of as it moved. They're like, 'oh, now I've learned the tenor one, harmony, and I've learned the bass two harmony, but I think I'm somewhere more in the middle, and my musicianship has picked up'. So, it was just about being flexible. Or I guess, as somebody else's voice changed, kind of saying, 'okay, that singer is stronger, and that person isn't quite finding it'. Like they'd kind of have that struggle of finding what octave they were in. And so even some of the tasks and responsibility was just helping them to position their voice in the right vocal range for the pitch that was happening. And so some of that was also just assigning kind of a stronger singer or having a section leader per section, just to kind of say, 'okay, can this singer sing it first', especially because coming from the female voice, and if I was giving notes, it was a little bit more challenging for them to kind of hear my voice. And then, if I sing at an octave lower, they would perceive it as a low timbre. So, then they'd go an octave below me again. So just having that strategy to help them place their voice the right way in terms of pitch range, not in terms of necessarily like timbre, but just in terms of picturing.

Brian: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Jenna: But I think that the range testing kind of on a like a frequent basis kind of acknowledging that it's like, okay last term it was here, it might have changed, and making sure that they were singing in a range that was comfortable, and that was also healthy, because I think some of them would be like, well, I'm a tenor one, and they would almost feel this like fixed attitude of like number one sing high, and they would continue to maybe try to keep singing in that pitch range when you could hear that it was starting to strain, and that it wasn't going to be safe or healthy for them to stay there. So just kind of saying to them, actually, it's okay that those notes aren't comfortable anymore, but let's move you along to tenor two, or even to like a bass one, to keep the voice healthy.

Brian: Great. Great. No, they're fantastic Jenna, I might move on to the next question, which is like, so when you joined the school, you're in the school, and you've done your

musical, and you have the choir in front of you. Were there any gaps in your knowledge that you had to go back and fill in? Like what did you have to know when you were working with this choir? And what did you have to learn? Kind of on the job?

Jenna: I think, yeah, because I mean, I had like I grew up like in like, I always went to an all-girls school. So even like, in terms of my experience, like exposure experience, it wasn't something that I had even had any exposure to. I also only have sisters. So, it wasn't something that I had any lived experience of at that point in time. So, like it wasn't like I was in school with boys, and like was aware of like what was happening and the conversations they would have. I didn't really have any male friends, so I literally had no exposure to it beyond knowing that it was a thing that happened, or even like maybe what happens in movies, you know, like there was literally no like real world experience of voice change. And all of a sudden I'm teaching in an all-boys school. And so, I think that's where that why I shied away from it in the beginning, because I didn't know I didn't know how they talked about it. I didn't know how to navigate it, and so I think that was something that I don't know whether it was if there was any kind of formal learning that happened to kind of get over that, or whether it was my own kind of like reflection and experience around it. But that was a huge thing, even just the comfortability around it, and also the listening that happened like, you know, just kind of the understanding. Okay, yeah, they're at this age, and that's what's like, just kind of seeing it happen and unfold in front of me in real time, with all these different year groups. Even just in the like, when I was teaching [named other teaching subject] like in the [named subject] classroom, hearing the voices change like seeing the age that they were when that change was happening. Because I wasn't in this environment with twelve- to eighteen-year-old boys. So not necessarily happening in the choral room, but just in terms of the spoken voice as well, those changes happened that was like a perceptive thing that. And so, I think there was a lot of learning on the job and just hearing those changes and getting feedback. And I think the boys at that point, the relationship I developed with them. They were also very comfortable in talking to me and telling me what things were going on. And so, even when they like talking to them about like falsetto, and as they were kind of navigating like, how to put that, did I want it in full voice, did they want, could they flip? And even at that point I was like, I didn't really fully understand what that was in terms of what was happening for them, how they were accessing it. And I was like, Yeah, if it's

more comfortable, if it's more comfortable for you to flip, flip. Don't sing that full voice. Yes, we'd want that to be loud, but like if it feels uncomfortable to go there, don't do it like, do you know. So, it was kind of just having that kind of that was the awareness that I had of it at that point in time.

Brian: It interesting, I think, am I right in saying a lot of what you're saying is, that the important things you seem to be mentioning are about relationships with them, but also, like really listening to what's in front of you, and listening and responding to what you're hearing.

Jenna: Yes.

Brian: And like, from what you said about the training that you had in some of the courses. None of those things need to be mentioned?

Jenna: No.

Brian: So, in terms of like importance, am I right in saying that you really think when working with boys its important have a proper relationship with them and be able to converse with them and create a feeling that it's an open space.

Jenna: Yes, and for them to like, just feel comfortable to play like, you know, just kind of creating that environment where it's like, okay, yeah, let's just see what happens. It doesn't matter if the sound is bad. It doesn't matter if, like, if the voice cracks. And I think one of the big things that creates a lot of embarrassment is voice cracks. And so even just normalizing that and being able to be like, yeah, we can laugh at this. Yeah, that was funny.

Brian: It still happens to me!

Jenna: But also, it's normal yeah. And just normalizing that that they know that, like, if these things happen, it's not the end of the world, that they feel like a level of like safety, and that they feel like they can just play. And what kind of I would notice happen is like

boys who had access, their falsetto being like, oh, this is what they would like, discuss their experiences. They're like, 'oh, this is what it feels like for me, so like, that's fine' or like. Do you know that they're like, 'oh, I just can't find it', and they'd be getting frustrated that they couldn't access certain things. And it's like, well, like, let's just like play. And I'm trying to think about like just different exercises about even just about like volume. And them feel, yeah.

Brian: I might just hold that is that because that's coming up, and I know you will have a lot to say on that.

Jenna: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

Brian: So can we move on to the next section, which is challenges and successes.

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: So basically here, this is directly in relation to boys who are going through voice change. Can you give me some challenges that you've encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change?

Jenna: Yeah, I think if I think about, specifically like that, yeah, that kind of. There's one, the first thing that came to mind is the ones who their voice starts to change, and they just don't want to sing anymore. And there's one particular student that came to mind, and he the most stunning, beautiful singer, and actually like a really great like contemporary singer as well. And he when he was like twelve, we had done this. We paired up with this girls school for a choir for a bit of time, and there was a like the first rehearsal day that we had with those girls, and he kind of like put himself forward for a step out solo like he was really confident like, and clearly like, loved to sing, and had, and knew that he had this presence in his voice, knew he had this quality. And just seeing that confidence in him and singing being like, yeah, that's something that he wants to do. And then, as he, and I don't know whether it was kind of puberty hitting and just the whole combination of things of like what being in choir as at a status level meant, and whether he didn't want to be associated with, whether that didn't feel cool, or whether it was because his voice

was changing and he just didn't know how to deal with that, he just like stopped coming to choir. He just didn't want to do it anymore. He just totally shied away from us. And then like, I don't know, like there was that thing of like some of the other boy's kind of saying, oh, and so that was the perception of the ones who stayed and like who kind of we're just like, 'oh, it's fine. We'll just go through it like'. And they felt maybe a level of comfortable about it. For him, it was definitely like a level of like that dissonance between the voice change. But also, maybe, what being choir like represented at that age. Like when you're kind of maybe in that thirteen- to fourteen-year-old space and perceptions of the other boys who aren't in choir. And so, I think that was definitely like a challenge of like. It's hard to kind of create, like a causal link as to whether like, did he stop coming to choir because his voice changed, or was it because of like the social implication of being in choir at that point in time as a boy? So I think I don't know, yeah, whether like a relationship can be drawn between those things. But definitely like that was kind of and something. Could you? Just, I guess, if you repeat the question? I'll be able to bring it back to something that was specific to the older boy like slightly later on.

Brian: Can you describe challenges that you have encountered when working with adolescent male singers going through voice change.

Jenna: Yeah, I was going to say, I think, I think musically, I think when you're trying to kind of balance the choir, and so you're trying to kind of make sure that you have, like a distribution of voices across all voice parts and ending up like with lots of voices in the middle, or maybe like starting out the like a year with having like really strong tenors, and then all of a sudden, those voices change, and then it's like, 'oh, we don't maybe have enough people who are able to sing those tenor one parts'. Or even sometimes musically, for a singer themselves, like where there's like repeat repertoire from one season to the next. So, they might have sung the repertoire in Transition year, and then they're coming back in fifth year, and in your mind you're like, 'oh, they know that harmony. I'll put them on that section'.

And then all of a sudden, their voice can't sing that anymore. So, there's kind of that navigating placement of voices around kind of what music they've learned. Or selection

music selection. You've kind of chosen repertoire. And then, actually, you don't like the voices, either. Don't sing high enough, or don't sing low enough.

Brian: Do you think that that helps their musicianship, training?

Jenna: Absolutely.

Brian: I think so as well, yeah. Some singers that like maybe have sung three different parts in one piece. Do you want to talk about that for? Maybe.

Jenna: Yeah, I think it's like a real opportunity for them to develop that musicianship. And even like, I think you know, when they have some that one part, and then they kind of jump onto another. And they're like, 'oh, I didn't realise that this is what's that was happening on the lower end', and oh, like they might reflect and kind of say, oh, they hear the piece differently, or they, I guess, or that it's also like difficult where they're like learning that new part, but also remembering the old one, and like having that having to navigate the challenge of not just jumping onto one of the other harmonies. But I think, yeah, if you're learning that many different parts from one piece and having to jump around, I think does create like a level of challenge. But then, in that challenge is a lot of learning.
Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: Yeah it's definitely one thing I've noticed about the singers from that choir that I've seen sing in other choirs. They have a stronger level of musicianship than of the other boys from other choirs, I think because they I think because perhaps you'd be them around different parts.

Jenna: Yeah, and I think, just created a level of normality around, kind of yeah, like, it's okay to jump around. It's like that, I think a lot of, and I think even because now like studying kind of vocal pedagogy, and people talking about how 'oh when I was like sixteen, I was told I was a soprano, and so then from then on I believed I was a soprano', and I think there's a lot of identity, then that then gets tied to the voice part that you are, and that level of like fixed mindset around what you can then sing. And then it's also like

kind of almost like self-fulfilling prophecy, right where it's like, 'well, you only sing in that pitch range, and you only think that that's the pitch range that you can sing in'. And so then you don't extend the voice to be flexible, to move around. And so I think I guess, just having that flexibility of kind of saying, Okay, yeah, how about like you sing tenor on this piece? And now, how about we move to baritone? How about you, and so it's like and feel what feels better. Just explore and see actually what feels more comfortable. And some of them will kind of come in and say, 'oh, I thought I was a tenor two', and actually now singing like baritone or the bass one part or the bass two part. My voice isn't fatigued anymore. So, they're realising in real time, but it's not saying, 'well, I need tenors so you can stay singing tenor?'.

Brian: Is it possible to, can I move on to, in terms of time, move on to successes? So, in this case you could share some memorable successes or moments of growth that you experienced while working with adolescent male singers. And I think again, this could be musical, non musica'. In general moments of growth you had when working with boys going through voice change specifically.

Jenna: I think just in general, like just seeing confidence grow. Like I think, when you see them just really enjoying music making and seeing that like, yeah, that they have those moments of challenge with the voice. But ultimately, they yeah, just seeing the connection and the camaraderie around it, I think, working with like the TTBB voices, for me, a lot of the successes were like I guess, just great music making. And also, I guess, then their desire to be better and to kind of work at it, and to want to go to competitions, and to excel. So kind of, I don't know if that's necessarily related to voice change and success with voice change. It's definitely just like success with boys who have recently gone through voice change, or who are like exploring, singing in this way for the first time. But I think I think just the for me, anyway, just having created that culture, and with the boys, I guess something that I like reflect on very fondly. I definitely like not being in that environment anymore. I definitely like miss what I had in that in that space and time in my life. It was definitely a very special time to kind of like to explore that with them, and to have that with them. And to kind of, I guess also to kind of see so many of them going on to continue to use their voices, having kind of maybe navigated those challenges and feeling that they were so. Maybe it was like them feeling supported through those

challenges so like staying within choral singing like and not leaving it because voice change was something that, like deterred them.

Brian: Great, great. I might move on to the next section if that's okay.? And this is a really important section. It's key qualities of effective conductors who are working with people going through voice change. And to start with, and what are the traits or skills that you believe are essential when working with adolescent males going through voice change? So, I think traits are kind of. I suppose you know.

Jenna: Personality things.

Brian: How you work with them. But skills are kind of specific skills that you yeah, are necessary.

Jenna: Yeah, I think if I go traits first. I think, you definitely need to be like warm, and having that like kind of inviting and energy. I think they, and so I guess in having that trait like creating an environment that feels safe and comfortable for them to explore, and that they feel that they can, that students or singers feel like that they can talk to you about things that might be causing embarrassment, or might be causing tension for them. That you are approachable, that they feel like they that they can communicate that with you. And I guess because even in around, like the music that they're singing, if they feel like they're going to like, let you down by not being able to deliver on something. Then, if that creates a level of fear for them like that's not going to be conducive to anything for anybody. So I think, yeah, being kind of warm, approachable but also like, kind of a level of firmness to kind of like to cultivate that like level of working hard towards that kind of shared goal like, but I think, yeah, I think definitely those kind of traits are, I would say for me the most important. From a from a musical point of view, I think an understanding of where those kind of places in the voice that are going to cause trouble are going to be kind of where, like, where those passaggios are going to be, where those high where it would become challenging, depending on what kind of pitch range they're singing, in what voice type they are. And also, just like a good sense of like warming up the voice like, what does the voice need in advance of singing? So, they're not just jumping in on singing this really high choral repertoire without an effective vocal, warm-up. But also,

kind of the ability to develop those musicianship skills. So that kind of musicianship side of things that sometimes the voice can do things, but that the musicianship won't allow so kind of the ability to develop those musicianship skills for choral singing. I also think, I guess, along with I guess, the warmup, that kind of awareness of breath, and how that influences the voice and access to various parts of the voice and tension that can kind of creep in. And also, that like physical awareness of kind of the body, and how the body is being used to support.

Brian: Yeah, any other skills that you think are required?

Jenna: I guess, in terms of like gesture in terms of the impact that gesture can have on the voice. So I guess if that gesture is kind of rigid, or like the breath kind of, or encourages like a locked breath, is going to kind of kind of introduce like tension into the voice unnecessarily, and maybe in a way that a conductor might be unaware of if, like, I guess you don't know what you don't know. And so, I guess that sense of understanding how your gesture impacts how one might access the voice or use the voice.

Brian: Fantastic. That's great Jenna, really, really good. And I'd like to ask you a few kind of more quickfire questions if on just various different aspects. And just your own personal way of like, just it doesn't have to be thought about too much, just really kind of what you would naturally do in this situation, and the first one is repertoire, selection for boys of this age. What are you looking for in repertoire? And actually, so obviously like, what are you looking for in terms of you know the voicing, etc? But in terms of like the words that are in it, and the meaning behind it, what kind of repertoire are you looking for?

Jenna: I think that's music that's going to be excitable. I mean, I feel like for me. I love like a beautiful like legato kind of sound, and so I would always like seek to find things that I just found to be musically exciting and kind of cordially exciting. But I knew that they were definitely more pieces that were for me, and like, not selfishly, but like that, I felt like I knew I was going to enjoy them, so I hoped that I could impart that level of like joy and enjoyment on the boys. But then there was also, I mean, some of our most successful pieces, I would say, was a beautiful piece called [named piece], which I ended

up like we kind of it did the round for a couple of years, but also ended up being a piece that we did for a virtual choir. But again it was upbeat very fast. Had all these kind of very repetitive, like [named piece]. So just that sense of camaraderie. and then the other one that was again a big hit was an arrangement of [named piece]. And again, it's just fun, it's vibrant. The lyrics are, there's humour, there's pace. And I think that was something that the boys really enjoyed. I think the slower kind of pieces definitely like was something that was more of a refined kind of like that they came to, whereas, like those pieces that were kind of upbeat, kind of fun, definitely kind of gripped them a little bit quicker.

Brian: Yeah, any other aspects of repertoire like when you're looking at a piece of music? Anything else you're kind of looking out for through the lens of working with a TTBB boys, choir?

Jenna: Yeah, I guess definitely, always like kind of in terms of pitch range, like, what is the highest note? Are they going to be able to, because a lot of those like, I guess with TTBB, if you're looking at the tenor lines like, how long are they spending in that extended range? Like, is it sitting there for an extended period of time? Does it go there once? Like, if it's sitting there consistently? I know that they're not going to be able to spend that amount of time up there consistently. So, it's just a no, even if it is a great piece. So yeah, looking at where within each of the voicings like, how long they're spending? Where is that like kind of, where is the range going, and how long is it spending there? I think, is the big one.

Brian: That's fantastic, and in terms of assigning, I know you've talked about this a little bit already, but assigning appropriate voice parts. What's your attitude towards that?

Jenna: I think assigning appropriate voice parts, checking in with range regularly. The voice is constantly changing. And so, yeah, just knowing that it is going to be a flexible thing, that it doesn't become a fixed position, and that you check in with how that's going. And also listen to the singer if they've been assigned a part and then they're saying, 'actually, this doesn't feel right' like being like, 'okay, which way do you want to move', allowing them to have a level of like, say within that. And that may not lead to a

balanced voicing across the choir, but ultimately like that's not what's most important at that point in time.

Brian: So, you're saying, what is most important is their vocal health really over you having the exact right amount in each part?

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: Okay, brilliant. And what's your opinions on retention of young male singers within the choir? Any tips on keeping them there? Musical, non-musical.

Jenna: Yeah, I think the musical definitely like having an event like a thing that gets them in in the first place, that creates that level of camaraderie. Definitely like is for me anyway, in my environment. Was this like was the sticking point. I think once they go into the senior side of things, I would say retention was high because there was enough happening that kept them interested. So having, like having kind of things that were special like they got to go out on trips. I did a trip to [named area], so we came over to [named area] or went over. I live in [named area] now since they came over. But yeah, we went to [named area] and had like a whole trip that was around like we did choral workshops went to see musicals, got to just like that level of like, oh, if we're in choir, we get to do these fun things going to competitions. I think some of them when they get to like the older years, and they think they need to not do it because of like exams and the time it's going to take up. I've definitely had others come back and be like, 'oh, I regret making that decision like it would have been fine'. And actually the camaraderie that you get from it is a positive thing for you, and you need things like that. So, I think just being able to share those experiences with younger students is like actually, it will be a positive thing for you to have.

Brian: Fantastic. What's your opinion on teaching young male singers' vocal technique.

Jenna: I think it's important for them to know what's going on to an extent. I think it's the how of how that technique is being taught. And so, while you might know all of the information, they don't need to be overloaded with technical terminology. So, I guess it

depends on what one means by what is teaching vocal technique? And so, if that means sharing lots of information about anatomy without any kind of connection to the somatic experience. Then that's pointless. Not entirely pointless, but I think there needs to be a level of like it being connected to a somatic experience and not a technical language about the voice.

Brian: Brilliant. And my next question was actually teaching vocal anatomy which you kind of answered there a little bit. Anything else you want to mention on vocal anatomy, but also like the use of the body and singing?

Jenna: Yeah, I think I think vocal anatomy is obviously very valuable. I think the age that you introduce that is important, but also like how it's introduced. So, I think that awareness of the body should be experienced. It should be experienced period. But also, I think, in terms of, there is a place for just kind of like isolating and being like, 'yeah, I know about my body. I know that this exists'. And so that it's useful for them to like, attach that to a visual and so whether that's the stage that's introduced at, I think, can be really dependent on the singer and the environment, and I think some singers might not be able to buy into the somatic thing without knowing what it means. And so then, that I guess maybe ties into like different types of learners or different kind of ways that people experience. Like, if you're using metaphor, for example, for some singers like they won't be able to like they that is too vague. And so that metaphor doesn't get attached if they don't have a definitive thing as to what that means, that metaphor won't necessarily translate in the way that it will for other singers like, 'oh, yeah, I feel what that means'. Other singers might kind of feel alienated by that language. So, I think it's yeah, It's definitely different people experience it differently, but I don't think there's, I don't think we should shy away from teaching vocal technique. I think it's just a matter of carefully considering how we are introducing that.

Brian: Brilliant. Yeah. And if you're not standing in front of them, lecturing them for an hour on vocal technique, it's kind of included in your teaching? Yeah. And the last bit in this section is what do you believe like in terms of mentorship and vocal role models like, what importance would you place on not having them in your choir? And what kind of vocal role models would you want?

Jenna: I think, in terms of role models if we want to be able to like from an audiation point of view, like being able to hear like in the same way as we have with pitch being modelled to us. In order to like make a sound, you need to know what that sound like, you need to know what the target is. And so, without a role model, there's no sense of well, actually, what is my target sound? What am I trying to create with this pitch like range? And so I think, like being able to hear it in your mind's eye, like, what is this sound I'm like aiming for? That becomes very challenging if you don't have a sense of what that is. And so, I think, yeah, I think I was very fortunate in the environment that I grew up in, always having, like excellent singers around to model and to kind of to know, yeah, 'what could this sound like? What am I striving for? What quality are we aiming for? Where am I right now?'. So yeah, I think it helps to singers to have a sense of what they're trying to achieve.

Brian: And in your in that, in your choir would you have placed vocal role models and mentors kind of in tactical places in the choir? So the younger kids could learn from it.

Jenna: Yeah, I think I think I would definitely have had, like across each voice part there was definitely singers who were stronger in each voice part. So, I knew, yeah, okay, tenor ones, that person is the leader of that. And so even just using them to demonstrate what those parts would be. Okay, can you sing that part? And then everyone else? Okay, can we join them? And even it's like, 'okay, I'll sing it once if you feel comfortable, sing it the first time. If you, if you don't feel like you, have it yet, listen to those who do have it, and then join in'. So then, even okay, it might have been musically, they weren't ready. Or also they just needed to hear it in in their same voice.

Brian: Yeah, brilliant, fantastic. And I might move on to the next question in this section, which is, what advice would you have for new or aspiring conductors in this field. So, if you were mentoring a new conductor who joined and over your choir here, what are the kind of the top things that you would advise them to do when working with adolescent boys, going through voice change.

Jenna: I think a lot of people are afraid to do something because it's unfamiliar. They feel like they don't have the skills to get started. I do think educating yourself is important but I also feel like a lot can be learnt on the job like in so much as. and I'll come back on that because I feel like it's I guess I don't want to say just go for it, because, like there's a lot of damage that can be done if you just go for it. So that's absolutely not what I'm saying! But I do think.

Brian: Be proactive is that kind of it?

Jenna: Be proactive. Yeah, like, know that? Like, okay, you don't have to know everything to get started like you can't like get started and then be proactive about what else? What? What do you need to know and like to recognise that there is a whole wealth of knowledge out there about the changing voice. And so, whether that's formal courses, books, but like, listen. Like I think there's so much like value in listening and not being afraid of not knowing stuff like. Don't pretend that you know what's going on like. If a singer comes to you and tells you this is what I'm experiencing, listen to them and listen to their experience. And to acknowledge that I don't have experience with that yet, or to acknowledge what you don't know and not be afraid to like say, 'actually, I've never. I haven't come across that before'. But I'm going to like use those experiences as platforms to kind of say, I need to go away and research, or I need to go away and find out.

Brian: There's this kind of sincerity in that, in terms of building relationships with young people that I think they tend to respect that that like 'oh you know, this person's going to go off and actually research this for me'.

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: And I think you know, yeah, that's great.

Jenna: Yeah.

Brian: Great fantastic, the final section of the interview is, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the participation of boys in Ireland, and where you see the future of adolescent male

participation in choral singing going. And to start with, what are your thoughts on the participation of boys in choirs in Ireland. And I'm really looking forward to hear your answer because, you know, so many schools have traditions of choral singing that lasted for decades and decades like the school you went to. But you actually went into a school that didn't have much of a tradition, and you created a real tradition. So, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on, on the participation of boys singing in Ireland.

Jenna: Yeah, I think, as you said, there are lots of schools that have that firm tradition, whether it be because of like status or kind of, I think a lot of it is to do with like finance and like socioeconomically, some of those schools that they just have that tradition in, built from like over like decades and decades. And I think in newer schools or in community schools where that might be seen like less, and there's less opportunity in younger years. I think it definitely is like, it's harder. I think it requires having people that believe in it, and that want that to happen and are willing to kind of maybe provide it. I think it requires like a level of buy-in from management. I was very like lucky to be very supported by the principal in my school. So that level of buy-in where I just felt like I wasn't going to have any pushback for trying to do stuff. I kind of was just given a little bit of like I'm not going to say free reign, but I was given an element of flexibility around what I was doing, because I guess management saw the value in this, and so it kind of, I guess, in terms of longevity, and even from grassroots up. I definitely think it requires buy-in from kind of key stakeholders for that to be encouraged and to, we developed. Unfortunately, I think a lot of the time, the problem is resourcing that like there's teachers there who would want to do it. But I think funding is a huge thing that like in order for these things to happen a lot of the time like, I mean, I wasn't paid for what I was doing in in that environment. And so, for me, it was like, I wanted to be able to do it. I wanted to be able to provide it. And so I think a lot of extra-curricular in state schools is a voluntary thing, and I think unfortunately, the expectation a lot of the time on that is, on music teachers, which I don't think is necessarily right for the amount of time that does go into it, and the amount of skill that you're required to have to do it. Like to give over all of that for free. But I think so I think if there could be more like funding for extracurricular music that would definitely like help with getting the boy singing because it needs people who want to do it. And I think I mean I think if you think about like it from a socio-political point of view, like people and cost of living like people being able to do things

for free like, and to use their skills for free, I think, is a big ask. And so, I think yes, there's so much that more that could happen for boys and for the boys changing voice, and for that kind of like demographic to get.

Brian: Sorry.

Jenna: Yeah, no, I was just going to say to get them singing, but I think there's a lot of buy-in that's needed as well on the other side.

Brian: And to finish this section like the broader scene in Ireland, with singing like, what can we do to bring it all together, do you think to get more and to get the information across about voice change and that it's a very, very normal thing that happens in Ireland, and what broader needs to happen?

Jenna: I think. I wonder, like, yeah, like, whether it's kind of having those people who are skilled like going in doing workshops in schools like, if there's a way for like facilitators to go and work with, whether that's at like entry level, like in like kind of like late in primary school, because I guess like for some boys, it does happen as early as like those later years of primary school. And so, whether it's yeah kind of workshops in schools, whether it's more education for music teachers. So, at things like the PPMTA kind of music conferences that happen annually like, is it getting in there and having that information like shared more frequently and more readily. Like specific things, anytime anyone goes to a conducting course that like that, the changing voice is like a priority, I guess, within those kind of things.

Brian: And isn't it with the with, the say, the PPMTA, where that is a conference for curriculum music teachers. And, as you say, so many of the people conducting the choirs are the music teachers. So, like at conferences like these, you know, they obviously need to focus on the curriculum. So, it's perhaps something else needed like for these conductors?

Jenna: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah I think the challenges created by that are evident.

Brian: Great. Will we finish up there? Jenna, will we?

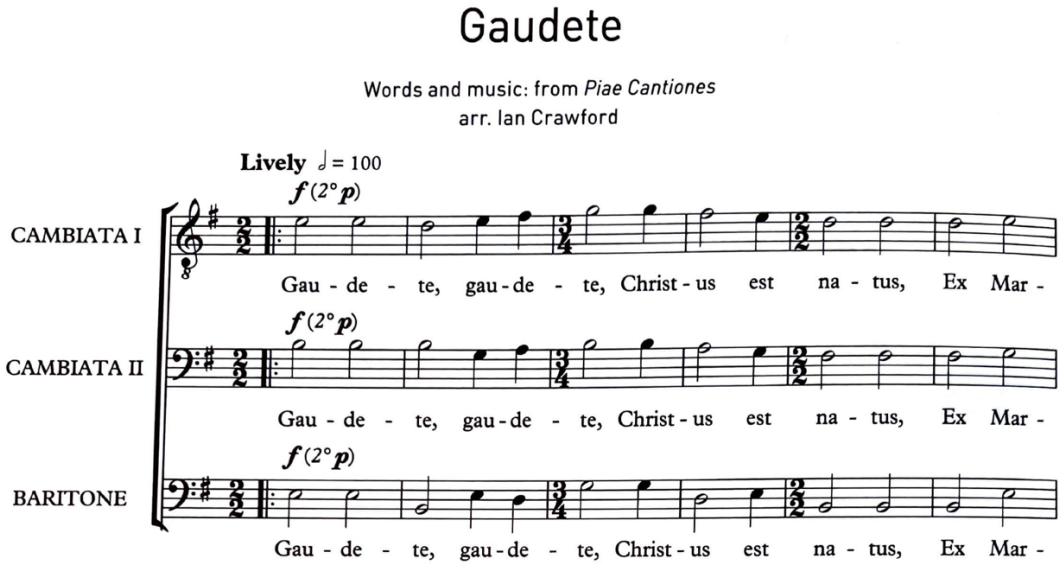
Jenna: Yeah, Fab, if you've got everything that you need from us.

Brian: Absolutely everything. Thank you so much for coming along today. That was absolutely brilliant.

Jenna: You're very welcome, happy to be able to help.

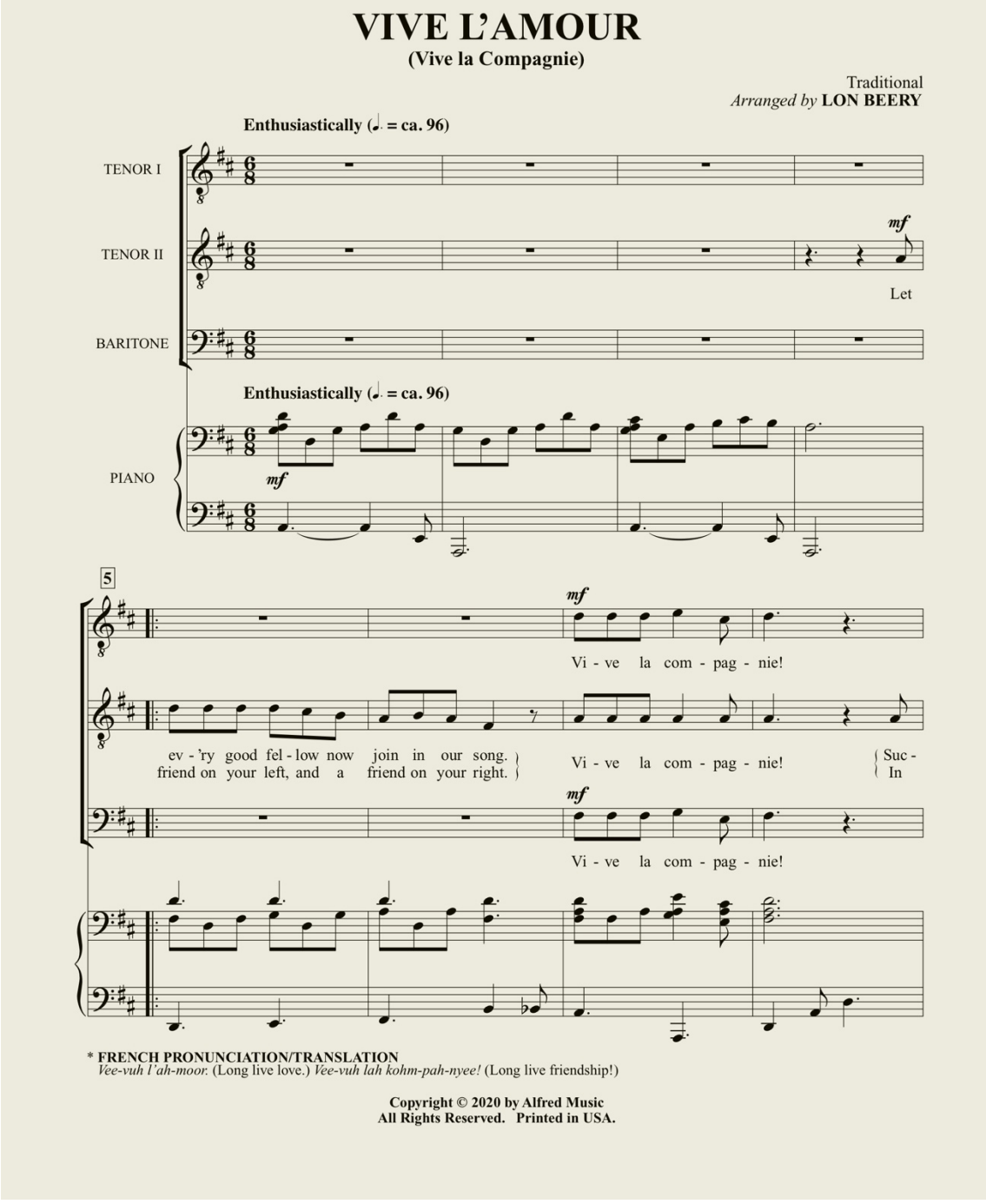
Appendix N

Example of music written for Cambiata 1, Cambiata 2 and Baritone



Gaudete, arr. Ian Crawford, bars 1-6.

Appendix O

Example of music written for Tenor 1, Tenor 2 and Baritone

Vive L'Amour, arr. Lon Berry, bars 1-8.