

## I Feel Good About My Boy-Voice

By Sophie De Goey

One of the most fundamental aspects of the soprano's self-regard is that when she opens her mouth, the sound that comes out is brighter than the stage lights. It must be sweet, heartwarming, free, and pretty. Always pretty, bitch. Before I started singing, many years ago, I was still told that every girl's voice should be high and cute. Even without ringlets, dimples, or dresses, girls are still girls if their voices are cuter than their male counterparts. Her voice is a young girl's anthem. Her soul sings out through it as surely as she sings the song stuck in her head.

Although this is something over which we have little control, it seems that a girl with a low voice is basically a girl whose balls dropped before any boy's in her grade did. If you're a tomboy or a lesbian, let's say, it is permitted that you talk like the boys do, but the second you let your voice drop to their timbre, you're a girl with a boy-voice.

As lightly—as girlishly—as I tried to dance around the expectations set before me, I suffered from their tyranny. When, at age nine, my own grandmother mistook me for my mom on the phone, I didn't correct her and instead spent twenty minutes using "I" instead of "Mom" and "Sophie" instead of "I". After that day, I started picking up the phone with a fake, high voice. When I went to singing lessons and was offered two different keys to sing in, I started choosing the higher one, even if it didn't sound as good to my teacher or to me. I would raise my eyebrows and cheeks to the point where I could have been a primary schooler with plastic surgery in attempt to become a soprano. My regular voice shifted up half an octave, a kind of boob-job, a medicine to turn my vocal chords effeminate.

Had my voice only become low after puberty, it would have perhaps been my secret weapon. Low, sultry voices on a woman are adored by men across the globe. The ever-popular Scarlett Johansson, in addition to other Hollywood actresses in years past, has bred the fetishization of the deep voice through her fame. Singers such as Adele, Cher, or Stevie Nicks are acclaimed for their rich quality, but I will bet you a cyanide pill that for every one of them, there are three Mariah Careys, Cyndi Laupers, or Christina Aguileras. Otherwise, there would be just too many boy-voiced girls in the music industry, and that would not be fair.

It was the lead role that broke me. When I was cast as Alice in the newly-written opera *Alice in Wonderland*, the idea that a lead role written not only for me, but for a young girl with a boy-voice that does not impede her femininity was a proposition only slightly more devoid of sense than its literary inspiration. Furthermore, it was no longer boyish to me to sing harmony instead of melody in a duet—it was powerful. I began singing along to Idina Menzel and Lana Del Rey, because they could hit low notes that I could and others couldn't. When I caught colds, I would sing along to Ryan McCartan and Freddie Mercury because I would drop from a mezzo-soprano straight to a tenor. A true boy-voice.

As I spoke with various vocal coaches in my mid-teen years, trying to make sense of the boy-voice, I noticed they kept giving me similar advice:

“You’re a mezzo-soprano. You’re not an alto or a tenor.”

“I would hope not.” I said. Though I have nothing against those ranges, I’ve always feared being one myself.

“But you’re also not one of the normal girls, with their fluttery and light soprano voices.”

“That’s my problem.”

“No. You have what they don’t. Power. You can do so much if you handle that voice of yours responsibly. Kind of just like the Batman of opera singing.”

“Kind of just like that.”

There is nothing even closely similar to saving Gotham City in singing mezzo-soprano. But I am a lady, a daughter, and a singer, whether or not I worry about the gender of my voice, and so I sing and speak with it, and those who mock me may listen to me tell them why.