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Reappraising the Queer Falsetto. Magnus Hirschfeld, Sexology, and the Gendered Vocality of Gay “Men”, 1900–1914

Summary

Filling a gap in falsetto history, this article unearths several mentions of male high-voice singing in Berlin’s homosexual subculture before World War I. Using the theories of the physician and liberationist activist Magnus Hirschfeld, a contemporary medical explanation for this phenomenon is discussed, especially with regard to Hirschfeld’s attitudes towards the singers’ gendered and queered bodies. His medical approach, which reinforces the singers’ performative agencies, is brought into conversation with more (post-)modern ideas of queer theory and voice studies, the concepts of embodiment, medicine, and gender providing for interesting points of contact between the two.

Dieser Artikel beschäftigt sich mit einem Desiderat der Stimmgeschichte: Entgegen dem weitverbreiteten Narrativ eines „Erbfalls“ zwischen Kastraten und Countertenören mit einer Lücke zwischen ca. 1830 und 1940 werden mehrere Fälle von hohem Männergesang in der homosexuellen Subkultur Berlins vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg besprochen. Die Theorien des Sexualforschers und Aktivisten Magnus Hirschfeld dienen als zeitgenössische, medizinische Erklärung dieses subkulturellen Phänomens, besonders im engen Zusammenhang mit der sexuellen und Geschlechtsdevianz der Sänger*innen. Dieser medizinische Ansatz, der letztendlich jedoch die performative agency stärkt, wird in den Dialog mit (post-)modernen Ideen aus der *Queer Theory* und den *Voice Studies* gebracht, wobei die Begriffe Körperlichkeit, Medizin und Geschlecht interessante Kontaktstellen zwischen den beiden Herangehensweisen bilden.

Keywords

Magnus Hirschfeld, queer history, male high voice singing, voice studies, Berlin, Wilhelmine Era

Introduction

Christopher Isherwood's gay uncle Henry Isherwood, "using the slang expressions of his generation, [...] referred to himself as being 'musical' or 'so'."¹ The vernacular use of the word "musical" meaning "homosexual" in Britain around 1900 points to the frequently stated link between queerness and musicality, a field that opens routes of investigation towards specifically queer or queered musical practices.² An example of such queer musical practices with a varying degree of subculturality will be explored in the following article: male high-voice singing in Berlin around 1900.³ Despite a general gap left in the prevalent narrative of falsetto history around this time, many mentions of male 'uranians' (who would today be termed queer individuals assigned male at birth) singing in "alto" or "soprano" survive in the ethnographical writings of Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), the German doctor, sexologist, and activist. Berlin was a hub of lesbian, gay, and trans* subculture even before the First World War, a fact documented by a wealth of narrative sources often overlooked by historians who tend to focus on the Roaring Twenties and Berlin's Weimar years.⁴

Hirschfeld, a pioneer in both sexological research and queer liberationism, often forms a point of reference for discursive histories of the period with his visionary medical writings.⁵ His theories are among the first to view gender and sexual deviance in a medical, yet self-affirming light, the inclusive term "uranian" comprising homosexuality, cross-dressing, and inter* and trans* identities.⁶ In order to convince the general public, some of his writings took on a

1 Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Christopher and his Kind, 1929–1939* (London 1977), 34.

2 Philip BRETT, *Musicality, Essentialism, and the Closet*, in: Philip Brett / Elizabeth Wood, eds., *Queering the Pitch. The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York–London 2006), 9–26, Philip BRETT, *Are You Musical? Is It Queer to Be Queer? Philip Brett Charts the Rise of Gay Musicology*, in: *The Musical Times* 135/1816 (1994), 370–376.

3 A "male voice", for the purposes of this article and only in order to be able to productively enter into a debate with early twentieth-century sources, will mean a voice produced by a body that has been assigned male at birth (pre-dating medical advancements in hormone replacement therapy and gender affirming surgery). In general, the words "male" and "female", problematic and contested as they may be in this context, will be used in a way that does not imply a sex determinism and refers more to the gender the individuals were assigned at birth. This again facilitates the cross-historical readings of early twentieth-century sources where this birth assignment was seen as the "fixed sex" of a person; however, it is the intention of this article to show that fixed binary categories of sex and/or gender begin to blur once confronted with Hirschfeld's theory of sexual intermediacy.

4 Notable exceptions being the seminal studies by James D. STEAKLEY, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (Salem, New Hampshire 1975) and Robert BEACHY, *Gay Berlin. Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York 2015).

5 On his influential yet controversial legacy between unequivocally laudable queer icon and bourgeois, eugenicist "child of his time" through the lens of his biographies cf. Kirsten LENG, *Magnus Hirschfeld's Meanings. Analysing Biography and the Politics of Representation*, in: *German History* 35/1 (2017), 96–116, doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghw142. More generally also Florian G. MILDENBERGER, *Per scientiam ad iustitiam? Werk und Wirkung von Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935)*, in: *Aschkenas. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der Juden* 28/1 (2018), 85–117.

6 The word "uranian" (*Urnig*) was first coined by the classicist, lawyer and gay rights activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–1895) and probably the only purely self-affirmative term around the turn of the century. This article will aim to use historical terminology wherever possible: since, as the Foucauldian critique of the "gay individual" has prominently shown, the conception and identity of queer individuals is subject to discursive historical change and is influenced by the theories available at the time at least as much as by their "natural predisposition", it would be oversimplifying matters to exclusively describe historical experiences in today's terms. However, an inclusive concept of "queerness", comprising categories of sexuality, gender deviance, and intersex embodiment, will be employed as an analytical category to facilitate the conversation with today's queer theory.

more personal approach: as a practising physician, activist, and homosexual himself (although he never publicly came out as such), Hirschfeld was prominently involved with Berlin's uranian subculture.⁷ He portrayed the lives and gatherings he encountered in his popular book *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* (Berlin's Third Sex, 1904), allowing the general public carefully crafted insights into this subcultural world.⁸ It is both here and in his more technically focused medical writings such as *Der urnische Mensch* (The Uranian Person, 1903), *Die Transvestiten* (The Transvestites, 1910), and the comprehensive textbook *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (The Homosexuality of Man and Woman, 1914) that Hirschfeld mentions several instances of singers performing music outside of their gendered range in both artistic and sub-cultural settings. This article will mainly focus on male high-voice singing, providing a complementary approach to Elizabeth Wood's classic article on "Sapponics" which treats female vocal desires and low voices in the late nineteenth century almost exhaustively.⁹

Beyond proving the existence of self-affirming falsetto singing between the 1840s and the 1940s,¹⁰ this article endeavours to connect these musical practices with Hirschfeld's activism and sexology. His theory of intermediacy (*Zwischenstufenlehre*), a radical model that posited all humans on a continuous sex spectrum between male and female, is of especial interest here: striving to explain deviance medico-biologically to resist the contemporarily prevalent religious and legal model of same-sex acts as a sinful choice, Hirschfeld focused on bodily characteristics of his research subjects, including their voices.¹¹ This notion of deviant voices in the light of the performers' sexual and gender deviance will be interrogated with the backdrop of the nineteenth-century voice theory and schools, which were in turn medically inspired. Finally, this reading is put into dialogue with today's ideas on queer and queered voices and bodies. While not necessarily *en vogue* in their supposed bio-determinism, Hirschfeld's notions can be put into dialogue with modern queer theory via the concept of embodiment: voice studies in particular are a field which relies on both the modern concept of cultural and discursive entrainment and the more tangible "material given". Ultimately, this paper asks how this historical

7 MILDENBERGER, *Scientiam*, 112.

8 Uranian "subculture" before the First World War is defined by more than merely being a subgroup of society with differing norms and values: as the forbidden nature of homosexual acts made it necessary for uranians to hide from prosecution, its invisibility and perceived deviance exceeds common denominations of cultural difference (although the police started tolerating "respectable" uranian venues from about 1890 onwards, cf. Jens DOBLER, *Zwischen Duldungspolitik und Verbrechensbekämpfung: Homosexuellenverfolgung durch die Berliner Polizei von 1848 bis 1933* (Frankfurt 2008)).

9 Elizabeth WOOD, *Sapponics*, in: Philip Brett / Elizabeth Wood, eds., *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology* (New York-London 2006), 27-66.

10 For the purposes of this article, vocal terms such as falsetto, high voice, head voice etc. are chosen in accordance with Robert Crowe's article on the use of the falsetto in the early nineteenth century in order to facilitate the connection between the two articles in their respective timeframes, the falsetto being "the upper register of a two-registered voice" of "the adult male". Robert CROWE, "He was unable to set aside the effeminate, and so was forgotten". Masculinity, Its Fears, and the Uses of Falsetto in the Early Nineteenth Century, in: *19th-Century Music* 43/1 (2019), 17-37, here 18.

11 The distinction between sex and gender does not exist in the German language; however, this fits the contemporary usage of the word since even the English-language distinction only emerged in the 1950s and can thus not be assumed to have been part of the theoretical tools of sexology around 1900. Considering both the biologicistic nature of Hirschfeld's theories and the historical word usage, *Geschlecht* will be translated as "sex" for the purposes of this article, as it would have been by contemporary translators before the first use of the English term "gender" in this context.

theory of queer high voices challenges our understanding of falsetto history, the history of medicine, and modern queer theory with its views on embodiment and the voice.

High Male Voices Between 1850 and 1940

The historiography of high male singing voices has long been focussed on two distinctive periods: the age of the castrati before 1800 and the birth of the modern countertenor in the 1940s. As the standard narrative goes, interest in castrato singing declined in the first half of the nineteenth century, until Michael Tippett “discovered” Alfred Deller and started the legacy of the modern countertenors as “heirs” of the castrati in the 1940s.¹² The main spaces for high (adult) male voices between these episodes were English (maybe also German-speaking) cathedral choirs, an environment dictated by tradition and with a certain antipathy towards female voices, and in parody and comedic female impersonation.¹³ While a gendered view of voices is a fixture of musical thinking since at least the Middle Ages,¹⁴ the codification and essentialisation of male/low vs. female/high voices was only fully established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Connected to discourses on nature and masculine “power” only achievable with the chest voice, criticism was directed against castrati and falsetto singers alike in the early nineteenth century, both using the more “fragile” head voice.¹⁵

Neither castrato nor falsetto, however, were explicitly associated with homosexuality or sodomy in the period of their “decline”.¹⁶ Rather, femininity discourses linked the falsetto to the effeminate homosexual later – it might, after all, not be a coincidence that the two earliest composers prominently writing for countertenors in the twentieth century, Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten, were both bi- or homosexual.¹⁷ David G. Rugger proposes a compelling narrative for the decline of the male high voice which mirrors Foucault’s history of homosexuality: the voice, shifting “from activity to identity”, became subject to medical discourses with the advent of the laryngoscope and thus a disciplined part of identity.¹⁸ The laryngoscopic method

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- 12 For this general overview cf. both the classic survey by Peter GILES, *The History and Technique of the Counter-Tenor. A Study of the Male High Voice Family* (Aldershot 1994); and the more revisionist approach by Simon RAVENS, *The Supernatural Voice. A History of High Male Singing* (Suffolk 2014). The wording of “heritage” is borrowed from Corinna HERR, *Gesang gegen die „Ordnung der Natur“? Kastraten und Falsettisten in der Musikgeschichte* (Kassel 2013), *passim*.
 - 13 On the history of the “comic falsetto” cf. Bradley K. FUGATE, *More Than Men in Drag. Gender, Sexuality, and the Falsettist in Musical Comedy of Western Civilization*, DMA Dissertation (University of North Carolina at Greensboro 2006).
 - 14 Elizabeth Eva LEACH, *Music and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, in: Ian Biddle / Kirsten Gibso, eds., *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice* (Farnham 2009), 21–39, here 30–32.
 - 15 On the decline of self-affirming falsetto usage by castratos and non-castratos alike, including the gender and sexuality discourses at play in this process, cf. seminally CROWE, *Masculinity*, *passim*.
 - 16 If anything, castrati were observed to have a “very strong drive to coitus [*den allerstärksten Trieb zum Beyschlaf*]”, but expectedly framed as a normative sex drive towards women. HERR, *Gesang*, 374–375.
 - 17 Further on Tippett’s homosexuality, his sex/gender theories remarkably close to Hirschfeld’s, and the “discovery” of Alfred Deller cf. Iain STANNARD, *Hermaphroditism and the Masculine Body. Tippett’s Aesthetic Views in a Gendered Context*, in: Ian Biddle / Kirsten Gibso, eds., *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice* (Farnham 2009), 279–304.
 - 18 David RUGGER, *Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body. Countertenors, Voice Type, and Identity*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Indiana University 2018), 8–9.

only served to further propel the image of the falsetto voice as a vocal flaw or dysphonic sound, mainly condemned using gendered ideas and images – the sound-producing mechanism resembled women’s throats in a way that was deemed an “imitation” and thus “artificial or ‘false’”.¹⁹

The hegemonic discourse of voice was tied to the usual political, class, colonial, and even racist contexts – in the United States, for example, falsetto was mainly mockingly used by minstrel performers in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Since a pronounced gender binary was seen as a sign of civilisation, falsetto as a transgression of gender norms became a marker for “otherness”, both in medical and colonial contexts.²¹ Hirschfeld’s own relationship to such colonial and racial essentialism is a complex one: inversely to his focus in innateness in the realm of sexuality, especially later in life he critiqued racial thinking with an anti-essentialist vocabulary, being among the first to use the term “racism”.²² Yet, some of his writings in which he uses ethnological knowledge to support his claim about the universality of homosexuality are undeniably shaped by colonial knowledge practices. These writings, however, work in a different direction than common colonial approaches in that they use non-Western lived experiences as unifying examples rather than racially dividing humanity, only ever mentioning cultural factors and never embodied characteristics such as the voice.²³ Using the voice as an example for such bodily difference was only possible in the discursive context of an essentialised and embodied reading of it as a “legible symptom of a fundamental state”, highlighting again the medicalisation and discursive control of the voice.²⁴

The discursive position of the high male voice around 1900 is undeniably problematic, but this does not necessarily equal its being out of use: in writings on queer subcultures, especially the ethnographical accounts of Magnus Hirschfeld and others on uranians in Berlin, there are many mentions of post-adolescent individuals assigned male at birth singing in high voices in varying contexts and settings.²⁵ First, there is a mention of a professional alto singer in the medical textbook “The Homosexuality of Man and Woman”:

“In the year 1911 a uranian [male] alto singer of Florentine descent, Leo d’Ageni passed away in the north of Berlin. Once a pupil of Liszt’s, it was the pride of his life to have participated in the premiere of *Parsifal* in Bayreuth as an alto. From then on, he lived in Germany and partially sub-

19 Morell MACKENZIE, *The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs. A Practical Handbook for Singers and Speakers* (London 1886), 55. A further example of this would be a diagram in Browne and Behnke’s voice school, grouping “men” against “women and children”: on the “men” column, there are no rectangles for the “upper thin” and “small” (i. e. head voice) registers as if men were unable to produce these registers and not just discursively prohibited from using them. LENNOX BROWNE / EMIL BEHNKE, *Voice, Song, and Speech. A Practical Guide for Singers and Speakers* (New York 1886), 171.

20 RAVENS, *Voice*, 191–192.

21 RUGGER, *Voice*, 80–83.

22 Heike BAUER, “Race”, Normativity and the History of Sexuality. Magnus Hirschfeld’s Racism and the Early-Twentieth-Century Sexology, in: *Psychology & Sexuality* 1/3 (2010), 239–249.

23 Cf. for example the second half of Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (Berlin 1920), concerning “homosexuality as sociological phenomenon”, or his *Die Weltreise eines Sexualforschers* (Brugg 1933).

24 RUGGER, *Voice*, 73.

25 This is corroborated by RAVENS, *Voice*, 195–200, who finds evidence for several “serious” or even “famous” counter-tenors in England “before the age of Deller”, often trained in or around cathedral choirs.

sisted on giving singing lessons. He was highly grotesque in appearance, everything about which was dyed and false, so one could not tell whether he was 40 or 70 years old; but apart from these weaknesses he was a man of honour through and through. In the meetings of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, he delighted the musical experts even more with the feminine grace of his performance than with his absolutely natural alto voice.”²⁶

While the way Hirschfeld employs the term “[male] alto singer” (*Altsänger*) implies that it was a term known enough to be used and understood by everyone (at least lacking a sensationalism salient in other contemporary sources), it is telling that even just the fact that he sings in an alto voice warrants his inclusion in the section on “voice and language” in a chapter on bodily diagnoses of homosexuality. While the medical nature of this categorisation will be addressed later, this named example of a professional male high-voice singer in the realm of serious art music already challenges the gap in historiography stated above.²⁷

Many other examples mentioned in Hirschfeld’s writings, however, take place in more subcultural settings.²⁸ In his publicly orientated and almost ethnographical book *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, Hirschfeld quotes from a newspaper article by a certain Rudolf Presber:²⁹

“The last stop on this interesting night out was a rather more elegant restaurant.³⁰ [...] Instead of the ghastly orchestrion, present in almost every other tavern, there is a respectable piano with a colossal stack of scores next to it. And playing it is a perfectly tolerable pianist and next to him a gaunt youth with the fuzz of incipient beard growth, with feminine gestures and a forced sweet smile, a broad-brimmed lady’s hat with a flowing veil on his pomaded head.³¹ The youth is singing

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- 26 „Im Jahre 1911 starb im Norden Berlins ein urnischer Altsänger florentinischer Abkunft, Leo d’Agni. Einst Schüler Liszts war es der Stolz seines Lebens, bei der ersten Parsifal-Aufführung in Bayreuth als Altsänger mitgewirkt zu haben. Seitdem lebte er in Deutschland und ernährte sich teils durch Gesangsunterricht. Er war eine überaus groteske Erscheinung, an der alles gefärbt und unecht war, sodaß man nicht wußte, ob er 40 oder 70 Jahre zählte; von diesen Schwächen abgesehen ein Ehrenmann durch und durch. In den Versammlungen des Wissenschaftlich-Humanitären Komitees entzückte er die Musik-Sachverständigen mehr noch als durch seine vollkommen natürliche Altstimme durch die weibliche Anmut seines Vortrags.“ HIRSCHFELD, *Homosexualität*, 133, translations mine where not otherwise stated. The parenthetical comments [male] and [female] are used to indicate where the German noun is gendered male or female to clarify gendered references in the original texts.
- 27 I wholeheartedly thank Robert Crowe for sharing insights into his yet unpublished research on d’Agni’s life and voice and his support in the preparation of this article.
- 28 While these events are corroborated by other sources, the special status of Hirschfeld in the publicisation of Berlin’s queer culture means both that there are few sources completely independent from him and that his writings give the most comprehensive views of Berlin’s subculture in this time (a further mention of this subcultural high voice usage being Paul NÄCKE, *Ein Besuch bei den Homosexuellen in Berlin. Mit Bemerkungen über Homosexualität*, in: *Archiv für Kriminalanthropologie und Kriminalistik* 15/2 (1904), 244–263, here 247).
- 29 It seems that the original to this newspaper article is unlocatable now: Jens DOBLER, „Weltstadtypen“. Auf der Suche nach einem Quellentext, in: Florian G. Mildnerberger, ed., *Unter Männern. Freundschaftsgabe für Marita Keilson-Lauritz* (Hamburg 2018), 85–92.
- 30 This was probably the longest-lasting uranian venue, Hannemann on the Alexandrinenstraße, which had a special focus on respectability. Wolfgang THEIS / Andreas STERNWEILER, *Alltag im Kaiserreich und der Weimarer Republik*, in: Berlin Museum, ed., *Eldorado. Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin, 1850–1950: Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur* (Berlin 1984), 48–73, here 59.
- 31 James J. Conway, translator of *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, suggests (without further evidence) this was Otto Müller, singer and pianist (often in drag), who in 1906 opened his own tavern under the name *Die schöne Müllerin*, both feminising his name and referencing Schubert’s song cycle. Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* (Berlin–Leipzig 1904), translation: Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Berlin’s Third Sex*, transl. by James J. Conway (Berlin 2017), 9–99, here 95, note 40; BEACHY, Berlin, 59.

– soprano ... The two rooms are filled with guests. Not a bad clientele, it would seem. [...] The naïve might not notice anything awry at first. He might merely be taken aback that the second [male] singer is also singing – soprano.”³²

Presber, not as familiar with uranian settings as Hirschfeld, mostly expresses wonder or surprise at what would have been the perhaps then-unusual combination of the performer’s voice and perceived sex, for him the most conspicuous thing about his stay in this specific venue. The seriousness of artistic pursuit described here again contradicts the assumption that falsetto was only used mockingly before the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly self-affirming examples from Hirschfeld’s book include the following excerpt of the description of a uranian birthday party in a similar, if slightly lower-class venue:

“But the climax of the evening comes when the birthday child is graciously led to the grand piano to loud applause from all present and in a melodious alto sings his favourite song ‘Oh, If Only I Were a Thief’³³ with as much longing as improbability.”³⁴

The focus on the alto might seem less pronounced here, and it is striking that only at the beginning of the paragraph itself, Hirschfeld uses nouns that imply that everyone in this paragraph is indeed assigned male at birth (afterwards only referring to female nicknames and feminine clothing). Within *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, Hirschfeld also describes more “serious” artistic approaches in the upper class:

“Last winter the *jour fixe* of one uranian artist was especially popular. This highly hospitable host received his guests [...] in intermediary garb, a cross between a princess gown and a ceremonial robe. The musical presentations, especially the host’s baritone and alto and the Danish pianist, were of the highest artistic standard.”³⁵

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- 32 „Die letzte Station dieser interessanten Nachtfahrt machten wir in einem feineren Restaurant. [...] Statt des gräßlichen Orchestrions, das kaum in einer der früher gesehenen Kneipen fehlte, neben riesigem Notenpack ein anständiges Klavier. Und davor ein ganz erträglicher Spieler und daneben ein hagerer Jüngling mit sprossendem Bart, mit weiblichen Bewegungen und einem gequält süßen Lächeln, einen breitrandigen Frauenhut mit wehendem Schleier auf dem pomadisierten Kopf. Der Jüngling singt – Sopran ... Die beiden Stuben mit Gästen gut gefüllt. Kein schlechtes Publikum, so scheint’s. [...] Dem Harmlosen mag hier zunächst wenig auffallen. Vielleicht nimmt’s ihn nur Wunder, daß auch der zweite Sänger – Sopran singt.“ HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 50–51 in the translation (40 in the 1904 original). Here and in the following, Conway’s translation has been adapted ever so slightly where necessary.
- 33 “O, dass ich doch ein Räuber wäre” is an aria from Carl Millöcker’s operetta *Gasparone*, premiered 1884 in Vienna. On homosexual affinity towards operetta cf. Kevin CLARKE, Einleitung. Homosexualität und Operette? in: Kevin Clarke, ed., *Glitter and Be Gay. Die authentische Operette und ihre schwulen Verehrer* (Hamburg 2007), 7–22.
- 34 „Ihren Höhepunkt aber erreicht die Stimmung, wenn das Geburtstagskind unter lautem Beifall aller von einem der Gäste graziös zum Flügel geleitet wird und in wohl lautem Alt mit ebenso viel Sehnsucht, als Unwahrscheinlichkeit sein Lieblingslied: ‚Ach, wenn ich doch ein Räuber wär‘ zum Besten gibt.“ HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 53–54 (43).
- 35 „Letzten Winter war es besonders der Jour fixe eines urnischen Künstlers, der sich großer Beliebtheit erfreute. Der überaus gastfreundliche Wirt empfing seine Gäste [...] in einer Art Zwischenstufengewand, einem Mittelding zwischen Prinzeßrobe und Amtsrobe. Die Musikvorträge, zumal die Gesänge des Hausherrn in Baryton und Alt und das Klavierspiel eines dänischen Pianisten standen künstlerisch auf der Höhe.“ HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 45 (35). The “Danish pianist” has been identified as the (actually Norwegian) performer Justus Henry Lockwood by Raimund WOLFERT, Justus Lockwood – Auf den Spuren eines norwegischen “Urnings”, in: *Mitteilungen der Magnus-Hirschfeld-Gesellschaft* 54 (2016), 33–42.

This “artist” can be identified as Baron Willibald von Sadler-Grün, a singer who sometimes performed under the stage name of Urany Verde, son of Wagnerian soprano Friederike von Sadler-Grün.³⁶ Sadler-Grün later gained fame as pianist, singer, and drag performer called “the baroness” in the uranian bar *Mikado*, which opened in 1907, and even went on tour through Germany, singing songs in female clothes and a high voice.³⁷ This array of evocations of high-voice singing in different contexts, whether private, subcultural, or public, in almost all social strata, might serve as illustration for this vocal practice, with all the performers mentioned here tied together by their uranian nature. One last remark in a pamphlet by Hirschfeld’s liberationist organisation, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee (*Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäres Komitee*), will serve as a neat segue into asking how Hirschfeld explains and frames these performances: when addressing bodily characteristics of individuals in the “third sex” (a term including homosexuals and all other diversions from heteronormatively framed gender constructions), Hirschfeld mentions

“not infrequent deviations from the [*sc.* male or female] average, thus boys and men with female breasts (“gynecomastics”), womanly voices (“[male] sopranos”), womanly skin and hair qualities, (see the image of the *Sopransänger* W. W. [Fig. 1]) and vice versa – girls and women with masculine hair coverage (“bearded ladies”), masculine voices and masculine appearance (see the image of Rosa Bonheur [Fig. 2]).”³⁸

Befitting its publication context, this reference to a male soprano is less culturally orientated and more geared towards a medical argument: in one sentence with other entirely physical characteristics such as breasts and hair, the voice serves as part of Hirschfeld’s medical argument and reveals itself as part of his broader theories.

36 Bernd-Ulrich HERGEMÖLLER, Sadler-Grün, Willibald von, in: Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, ed., *Mann für Mann. Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte von Freundschaft und mann-männlicher Sexualität im deutschen Sprachraum* (Münster 2010), 602–603.

37 Emil SZITTYA, *Das Kuriositäten-Kabinett. Begegnungen mit Landstreichern*, etc. (Konstanz 1923), 60; Iwan BLOCH, *The Sexual Life of Our Time in its Relations to Modern Civilization* (London 1908), 500; THEIS / STERNWEILER, *Alltag*, 59; BEACHY, Berlin, 61.

38 „[...] nicht selten[e] Abweichungen vom Durchschnitt, also Jünglinge und Männer mit weiblichen Brüsten („Gynäkomasten“), weiblicher Stimme („Sopransänger“), weiblicher Haut- und Haarbeschaffenheit, (siehe das Bild des Sopransängers W. W. [Fig. 1]) und umgekehrt Mädchen und Frauen mit männlicher Behaarung (Bartdamen), männlicher Stimme und männlichem Aussehen (siehe das Bild der Rosa Bonheur [Fig. 2]).“ *Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäres Komitee*, *Was muss das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen!* (Leipzig 1901), 5; translation in: Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Berlin’s Third Sex*, transl. by James J. Conway (Berlin 2017), 101–126, here 105.



Fig. 1: “The [male] soprano W. W. in female clothing” (*Der Sopransänger W. W. in Frauenkleidern*), source: Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäres Komitee, *Was muss das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen!* (Leipzig 1901), 6



Fig. 2: “The painter Rosa Bonheur in male clothing” (*Die Malerin Rosa Bonheur in Männerkleidern*), source: Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäres Komitee, *Was muss das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen!* (Leipzig 1901), 7

Queerness, Corporeality, and Intermediacy of the Voice in the Theories of Magnus Hirschfeld

Hirschfeld’s sexological theories deserve a closer look before focusing back on his treatment of the voice. Reacting to widespread legal and religious discourses at the time, Hirschfeld’s focus as an activist and doctor was to prove that homosexuality was congenital and not chosen, which had “critical, forensic, and therapeutical” implications for Hirschfeld.³⁹ For this, he strived to find physical features in homosexual bodies that proved these theories through thorough personal examination and statistical surveys via questionnaires. Even more radical, however, were his views on the sex binary: expanding on Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’s concept of a Third Sex, Hirschfeld’s theory of sexual intermediacy (*Zwischenstufenlehre*) posited a spectrum between the male and female sex. All uranians were not at either end of the spectrum, since, for example, a sex drive towards women was classed as a “male sex drive” and thus a male feature in a woman desiring other women.⁴⁰ Bearing much closer resemblance to modern queer theory

³⁹ Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Der urmische Mensch* (Leipzig [1903]), 10.

⁴⁰ For a nuanced reading of this tension between third-sex theory and the idea of a continuous spectrum including the historical implications of this radical approach cf. J. Edgar BAUER, *Der Tod Adams. Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen zur Sexualemanzipation im Werk Magnus Hirschfelds*, in: Manfred Herzer, ed., *100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung. Dokumentation einer Vortragsreihe in der Akademie der Künste* (Berlin 1998), 15–45.

than most medical explanations at the time, this approach allows for explanations of behavioural as well as bodily aspects of cross- or trans-gender identification which Hirschfeld pointed out in his writings (including aspects from bodily appearance and personality to handwriting).⁴¹

Many of the passages above, especially the last one, have already illustrated how Hirschfeld approaches the voice as a medical fact, both conforming to its position in the medical discourses on voice and making it usable for his theory of intermediacy. Hirschfeld's employment of male soprano singing in direct conjunction with "gynaecomastia" and hair and skin complexion is telling for his view of the voice as determined by birth sex just as much as secondary sex organs like the (female) breasts: not addressing any agency in vocal usage in this specific text, the voice seems like an unchangeable medical fact and thus a possible symptom of homosexuality and intermediacy.⁴²

In his medical writings, Hirschfeld offers a more detailed view on this vocal difference, most prominently in his medical textbook *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*. In the chapter on the diagnosis of homosexuality, "voice and language" are second on the list of "sexual incongruities" directly after the genitalia, explaining that the pitch of a voice "directly depends on the condition [*Beschaffenheit*] of the vocal cords".⁴³ Using numbers from his own statistical surveys, he then proceeds to explain that 16 % of his "male" uranian subjects speak and sing in *Fistelstimme* (head voice or falsetto) and, even more poignantly, points out a large number of larynx abnormalities, especially concerning the "male shape of the larynx" in homosexual women and a frequent lack of an Adam's apple in homosexual men. A similar, but slightly more nuanced approach to this very medically focused view, however, can be found in one of Hirschfeld's earlier writings, *Der urnische Mensch*. When describing irregularities in uranian puberties, his first example for these differences is the voice, especially the process of voice change:

"The voice change often never comes to pass, sometimes it extends for a long time, not infrequently it only becomes noticeable relatively late, at the age of 19 or 20 years; a great many have the inclination to sing with a soprano or falsetto voice even after mutation, others who have not mutated at all are able to extend their voice to a deeper range with methodical exercise. Thus reports W. v. S. [*i. e.* Willibald von Sadler-Grün], an excellent baritone (with tenor qualities) whose picture in male and female clothes we give here [as Fig. 3]: 'My voice has never gone through a

41 Considering Hirschfeld's treatment of, for example, gay men as "not completely male", using the binary terms "male" and "female" or "man" and "woman" to distinguish between individuals assigned male or female at birth seems problematic; Hirschfeld himself uses the word "male" in inverted commas for some uranian "men" (e. g. HIRSCHFELD, *Mensch*, 24). This classification was not unanimously accepted by homosexuals at the time, many of whom did not agree with Hirschfeld's definition of the uranian as "less of a man". Claudia BRUNS, „Ihr Männer, Seid Männer!“ – Maskulinistische Positionen in der deutschen Homosexuellenbewegung zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts. Zwischen Revolution und Reaktion, in: Andreas Pretzel / Volker Weiss, eds., *Politiken in Bewegung. Die Emanzipation Homosexueller im 20. Jhd.* (Hamburg 2017), 27–64; Marita KEILSON-LAURITZ, Tanten, Kerle und Skandale. Flüggekämpfe der Emanzipation, in: *ibid.*, 65–77.

42 This includes both speaking and singing voice, as several examples in *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* illustrate: HIRSCHFELD, *Berlin*, 19 (11); 32–33 (22). Only later in his life does Hirschfeld get in touch with endocrinology and hormone replacement experiments (including testicle transplants to "cure" homosexuality) which will challenge his ideas about innateness and genetic determinism. Manfred HERZER, *Magnus Hirschfeld und seine Zeit* (Oldenburg 2017), 244–251.

43 HIRSCHFELD, *Homosexualität*, 134.

noticeable mutation; at the age of 23 I could sing soprano, and I am still able to today (at 30), lower speaking and singing sounds I only reached through instruction and exercise.”⁴⁴



Fig. 3: “Willibald von Sadler-Grün in several garbs”, source: HIRSCHFELD, *Der urnische Mensch*, after p. 64

Thus, Hirschfeld poignantly explains all uranian male high-voice singing with a causal reference to the singers’ uranian “nature”, even in those whom he specifically mentions as having gone through voice change but still preferring to sing in falsetto. Still, it seems to require more of Hirschfeld’s argumentative finesse to explain the readily available observation that many (adult) homosexual males nonetheless speak and sing in lower voices.⁴⁵ His reference to “instruction and exercise” brings Hirschfeld into conversation with vocal theory and vocal practice at the time: as discussed above, the male falsetto register was not seen as part of the male range in late nineteenth-century voice pedagogy; singing in falsetto was not part of the singer’s

44 „Der Stimmwechsel tritt oft überhaupt nicht ein, manchmal erstreckt er sich über eine lange Zeit, nicht selten macht er sich verhältnismäßig spät mit 19 oder 20 Jahren bemerkbar; sehr viele haben nach der Mutation noch die Neigung, Sopran oder Fistelstimme zu singen, andere, die nicht mutiert haben, sind imstande, durch methodische Übungen ihr Organ wesentlich zu vertiefen. So berichtet W. v. S., ein ganz hervorragender Barytonsänger (mit Tenorqualitäten), dessen Bild in Herren- und Damentracht wir beifügen [Fig. 3]: „Meine Stimme hat nie einen merklichen Umschlag oder Übergang gehabt, mit 23 Jahren konnte ich Sopran singen, und kann es noch heute (30 J.), tiefere Sprech- und Singtöne habe ich erst durch Schule und Übung erlangt.“ HIRSCHFELD, *Mensch*, 64–65. This passage is reused completely unabridged in HIRSCHFELD, *Homosexualität*, 119–120, so it can be assumed that this remained Hirschfeld’s medical view for a longer time and was not deemed erroneous by himself shortly afterwards.

45 Later in *Der urnische Mensch*, Hirschfeld admits (with reference to uranian voices) that “in adult homosexuals, complete inversions of these sex characteristics are only rarely observable but rather more usually intermediate levels [*Mittelstufen*]”. HIRSCHFELD, *Mensch*, 84.

agency but had to be explained medically. This might explain Hirschfeld's seemingly "inverted" approach of starting the explanation with the higher voice as natural and the lower, more masculine voice as product of self-schooling and discipline. By framing the discussion in this direction, he gives greater agency to the singers in relating their higher registers to bodily intermediacy and not to a dysphonic "error". In explaining part of the vocal range as result of training, the singer's agency is valued over the biological constraints of their innate voice.

An interest in the binary interpretation of intermediacy is a focal point of Hirschfeld's work on intermediacy in general: several of his publications include pictures of uranians in both female and male clothes and in the nude as a sort of spectrum.⁴⁶ Willibald von Sadler-Grün is also depicted in this way (see Fig. 3, without the nude photograph because of the public status of nobility), which provides an intriguing parallelism with the way the singing is described in *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht* as "baritone and alto".⁴⁷ It is not, as singing technique demands, the range *from* baritone *to* alto or the superior masking of the voice break that is applauded, but rather it seems that baritone *and* alto are two separate categories, like separate garments to wear, probably employed in different songs.⁴⁸ The high voice combined with the "intermediate garb [*Zwischenstufengewand*]"⁴⁹ clearly marks Sadler-Grün as member of the "third sex" – if only because the constraints on the choice of singing register for non-uranian men seemingly do not apply. With Hirschfeld's medical explanation of this high voice singing, the singer's agency over the entire range from bass to falsetto is restored by recasting it as part of a "natural uranian range", not a phantasy outside of a hegemonically male range.

Another look at this pictorial technique, together with the split between "baritone and alto", might lead to a different reappraisal of Hirschfeld's theories – if, as RuPaul says, "we're all born naked and the rest is drag", then nothing illustrates this better than such a series of pictures with the same body in different gendered garments.⁵⁰ These images strongly imply that Hirschfeld was at least implicitly aware of a pre-Butler idea of performative gender as the way in which societally shaped characteristics are actively "put on" to the materially given body. The falsetto voice, too, used in context of cross-dressing or femme performances, is part of this interesting dichotomy – produced by a congenitally uranian body, a symptom of this intermediate stage, but also used in performatively gendered ways in the one or other direction.

The newfound agency concealed in Hirschfeld's only seemingly biologically determinative theory opens up several routes for exploration – and as so often in the history of (male) homosexuality, the two extremes are the closet on the one hand and the reclaiming of femininity on the other. Sadler-Grün's training for a lower voice in order to pass as more masculine reveals closet-like desires in itself – even more specifically, in *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*, Hirschfeld quotes a longer passage by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in which he addresses

46 Further on this photographic technique and its implications for Wilhelmine sexology cf. David PRICKETT, *Body Crisis, Identity Crisis. Homosexuality and Aesthetics in Wilhelmine- and Weimar Germany*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Cincinnati 2003), 4–37.

47 HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 45 (35).

48 The German original praises Sadler-Grün's "*Gesänge in Baryton und Alt*", translatable as "songs/chants in baritone and alto", making it sound like the registers were used for separate *Gesänge*. Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 For an examination of this quotation and its meaning in relationship to drag, embodiment, and popular culture cf. Anna POLETTI / Julie RAK, "We're All Born Naked and the Rest Is" Mediation. Drag as Automedia, in: *M/C Journal* 21/2 (2018), doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1387.

his singing voice. Ulrichs stresses twice that his enjoyment of his own falsetto voice is dependent on his being alone (“*weiß ich mich allein*”); when in choir, he sings the more masculine bass part.⁵¹ This “vocal closet”, quite strikingly, relies on the use of all of Ulrichs’s registers in a conscious and societally shaped way.⁵²

When reclaiming femininity, however, the relationship to Hirschfeld’s descriptions of uranian subculture in general is clearer: explaining more effeminate traits in homosexuals is the main thrust of Hirschfeld’s argument, illustrated by his many invocations of events with female impersonators and falsetto singers. Significantly, the young soprano in Presber’s description is not only singing “femininely” but is also wearing a lady’s hat and a skirt-like apron, and Presber points out the “feminine gesture”.⁵³ These performances, so focal to Hirschfeld’s argument, but also so surprising in light of current views of uranian culture before the First World War, invite commentary both from a historiographical and from a queer theory point of view.

The Voice, Medicalisation, Embodiment, and Queer Theory

One main terminological question arises from these performances – avoiding the pitfalls of anachronism, can these performances still be called “drag”? The caution towards the distinction between identity-forming drag and the early twentieth-century, mainly misogynist “female impersonation” is salient in this context. Nevertheless, Hirschfeld also mentions falsetto performances in female impersonation settings, with the customary revelation of the “true” sex of the performer at the end, both by removing the wig and “reinforcing the masculinity of the female comic with a booming bass”.⁵⁴ While this speaks of a licence for more experimental gender play in performance contexts, as long as the performance stays performance, the individuals mentioned above do not seem to rely on this “reassuring reveal” at all.⁵⁵ If Hirschfeld’s theory of intermediacy is accepted, the early twentieth-century concept of drag or female impersonation quickly becomes obsolete with its then-inherent idea of the sex binary. If the uranians performing are not really “male” anyway, what does it mean to dress as the “opposite” sex? Crucially, neither Hirschfeld nor the performers themselves call what they are doing cross-dressing or impersonation; rather, the feminine elements of dress, voice, and embodied gesture are already parts of their identity anyway.⁵⁶ Contrary to the mockery of female impersonation,

51 HIRSCHFELD, *Homosexualität*, 132–133.

52 Conversely, in *Die Transvestiten*, Hirschfeld mentions individuals assigned male at birth training their *Fistelstimme* in order to pass as more feminine or a woman. There is, however, a taxonomical difference between “transvestites” and effeminate homosexuals in Hirschfeld’s worldview, emphasised by these opposing directions of “naturalness” and training. Magnus HIRSCHFELD, *Die Transvestiten. Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleidungstrieb* (Berlin 1910), 167.

53 HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 50 (40).

54 HIRSCHFELD, *Transvestiten*, 454. The case discussed here even concerns a “double reveal” of a person assigned female at birth “pretending” to be a man in order to be a female impersonator.

55 Laurence Selenick frames this as “the necessary coda to the act”; “a reassurance that order had been restored”. Laurence SELENICK, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag, and Theatre* (London–New York 2000), 282.

56 See for example the many mentions of uranians assigned male at birth performing in female roles in Hirschfeld’s *Berlins Drittes Geschlecht*, or the lengthy enumeration of cross-gender “nicknames”. HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 54–58 (43–47).

both the vocal and sartorial cross-gender identification are treated with affirmative seriousness. In a self-description surviving in a concert critique by music critic Eugen Isolani, Willibald von Sadler-Grün describes an affinity to song and voice as follows:

“I step before your judgement in this garb and with my gifts, and I ask you to give me advice whether a creature like me, a special psychological phenomenon, studied by well-known psychiatrists such as Krafft-Ebbing, M. Hirschfeld, and others, is capable and qualified to become ‘the song’? Opera as well as oratorio are closed off to me by nature, hence I have pursued the *Lied* with all ardency. Or does my hermaphroditism irrevocably condemn me to the vaudeville? I would have humbly remained in seclusion if we had not lost our fortune and had I not now been forced to make money solely from my art. Until I was 23 years of age, I could only sing soprano, only then my mum and teacher Friederike Grün (Prussian Royal Court Opera and Saxon Coburg-Gotha Chamber Singer) (first Fricka in Bayreuth) succeeded after years of effort to elicit by and by more sonorous tones, until after six years this voice, which you may kindly evaluate now, was formed. My soul, my mind is entirely woman, naturally also my outlook [*Auffassung*], but in the eyes of the law I am to be a man. Yours respectfully, Urany Verde.”⁵⁷

While it would seem anachronistic to draw modern borders between trans* and gay identities opposed to the all-encompassing term “uranian”, the contradiction between Sadler-Grün’s testimonial of being “entirely woman” and Hirschfeld’s reading as a uranian on the male end of the spectrum is apparent. Despite Sadler-Grün’s focus on soul, mind, and *Auffassung* (counteracting Hirschfeld’s focus on the body), the high voice is reported to be natural and not part of female impersonation but of a certain “hermaphroditism”.

Contemporaries, however, did not necessarily follow Hirschfeld’s interpretations, as Isolani’s article itself shows: he reads Sadler-Grün as a circus trickster, doubting even the singer’s life story. Despite thinking of Urany Verde as a “man in women’s clothes”, Isolani only follows Sadler-Grün’s self-description as hermaphrodite far enough to pejoratively refer to the singer as “it”:

“The – actually very beautiful – voice has a quite male sound and is only spoiled by the over-frequent use of the head voice. If one wanted to look at the issue from a musical point of view, I think that Urany Verde could become a proficient singer quite easily, if it [*sic!*] were to decide to perform in male clothing and employ the male voice correctly. [...] Since I have not had the pleasure of

57 „Ich trete in diesem Gewande mit meinen Gaben vor Ihr Urteil und bitte Sie, mir den Rat zu erteilen, ob ein Wesen wie ich, eine psychologische (!) Sondererscheinung, mit der sich namhafte Psychiater wie Krafft-Ebing, M. Hirschfeld und Andere beschäftigt haben, befähigt und berufen wäre, „das Lied“ zu werden? Oper, sowie Oratorium sind mir naturgemäß verschlossen, darum wählte ich mit aller Innigkeit das Lied. Oder verurteilt mich meine Zwitterbildung unwiderruflich zum Variété? Ich wäre bescheiden in der Verborgenheit geblieben, wenn wir unser Vermögen nicht verloren hätten, und ich nun darauf allein angewiesen bin, mit meiner Kunst Geld zu verdienen. Bis 23 Jahren konnte ich nur Sopran singen, dann gelang es nach jahrelanger Mühe meiner Mama und Lehrerin Friederike Grün (preuß. Königl. Hofopern- und sächsische Coburg-Gothaische Kammersängerin) (erste Fricka in Bayreuth etc.) nach und nach sonore Töne zu gewinnen, bis nach sechs Jahren diese Stimme, die Sie nun gütigst beurteilen wollen, ausgebildet wurde. Meine Seele, mein Geist ist ganz Weib, naturgemäß auch meine Auffassung, vor dem Gesetz jedoch soll ich Mann sein. Hochachtungsvoll ergebenst Urany Verde.“ [Eugen] ISOLANI, Berliner Brief in der „Kleinen Presse“ vom 15. Okt. 05, in: Monatsbericht des Wissenschaftlich-humanitären Komitees 4/11 (1905), 11–12.

Urany Verde's acquaintance until recently, I am almost ready to doubt that this very powerful male voice was only the object of languishing until the twenty-third year of the individual's life, and the event seemed to me as if a sly male singer intended to exploit the currently very strong interest for perversities."⁵⁸

With this backdrop of contemporary opposition and disbelief, Hirschfeld's focus on the inateness of such practices gains a new character: his use of the scientific method of medicine both positivistically and positively reinforces minority identities rather than controlling them in a Foucauldian manner. The tension between performative gender and the materially "given" bodies remains fairly strong in the case studies presented above with many of the performers' self-identifications difficult to gauge from the extant source material.⁵⁹ While it would be relying on a bold assumption to disregard Hirschfeld's and Sadler-Grün's testimonials of naturalness and medical deviance, especially in Sadler-Grün's case, the claims of singing in both baritone and alto make it likely that there were singers with what today is seen as a "full" male range from bass to falsetto who made conscious decisions in their choice of register.

As such, the term "vocal drag" as coined by Elizabeth Wood therefore seems to be applicable here to a certain extent: singing outside the normative gendered range and assuming the range of another gender, doubling with the sartorial drag on stage and in other performance settings.⁶⁰ Wood's main thrust, however, the connection between gender-playing, specific voice practices, and same-sex desire could also productively be employed for the settings quoted above, if it were not for the lack of sources on these specific and subcultural situations. In the interpretation of Wood's article, a point that T. Carlis Roberts makes draws the attention to a fact thus far overlooked: in his view, Wood's subversive term "sapphonic" can only ever be applied to female voices. While it does not seem compelling for the early twentieth-century context outlined above that male voices cannot be deviant per se, Roberts's observation that "in Western classical music, singing both high and low are prized as feats for the male voice" points to interesting contradictions in this source material.⁶¹ It is specifically the use of the falsetto or head voice that is "outlawed" by vocal discourse, but neither Hirschfeld nor Sadler-Grün mention vocal registers, only the pitch of the performers' ambitus. However, allowing for bodily variance, the range is described as alto or even soprano, which seems difficult to reach

58 „Dabei hat die übrigens sehr schöne Stimme durchaus männlichen Klang und wird nur durch überhäufige Anwendung von Kopftönen augenscheinlich verdorben. Will man also die Sache vom musikalischen Standpunkt aus ansehen, so meine ich, daß Urany Verde ganz gut ein tüchtiger Sänger werden könnte, wenn es [sic!] sich entschließen wollte, in Männerkleidung aufzutreten und seine Männerstimme richtig anzuwenden. [...] Da ich Urany Verde bisher zu kennen nicht das Vergnügen hatte, möchte ich es beinahe bezweifeln, daß diese sehr kräftige Männerstimme bis zum dreiundzwanzigsten Lebensjahr des Individuums nur Sehnen war, und auf mich machte die Veranstaltung den Eindruck, als ob ein schlauer Sängersmann das augenblickliche, allgemein sehr starke Interesse für Perversitäten auszubeuten beabsichtige.“ Ibid.

59 The unsettling uncertainty that arises from the connection between voice registers and gendered categories mirrors the sentiment of Wayne KOESTENBAUM, *The Queen's Throat. Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London 1994), 154–175.

60 Wood, of course, coins the term for lesbian women singing in low voices: WOOD, *Sapphonic*, 37 and 60–61. HIRSCHFELD, *Homosexuality*, 133–134, provides more examples of professional singers assigned female at birth using low voices that could further illustrate Wood's approach.

61 T. Carlis ROBERTS, *Voicing Masculinity*, in: E. Patrick Johnson / Ramón H. Rivera-Servera, eds., *Blacktino Queer Performance* (Durham, North Carolina 2016), 154–166, here 163–164.

without the use of the head voice (as also corroborated by Isolani's critique). Rather than just the general direction of high or low, there are limits to an "acceptable high pitch" which are broken by these queer performers, and hence, the sound thus produced is ostracised by contemporaries. In this sense, the (too) high male voice around 1900 is deviant and "flawed" in a sense that Freya Jarman-Ivens would describe as queer in itself: not just gendered and marked, but outlawed and "false".⁶² Using an approach informed by Judith Butler, Ulrich Linke also defines the queerness of male high voices depending on their discursive surroundings.⁶³ In his model and contrary to Roberts, Sadler-Grün's high voice would be classed as subversive and queer if only by virtue of the critique it receives from contemporaries and its position outside the normatively "correct" voice usage of the period.

A closer look at Hirschfeld's voice theory might lead to a reappraisal of his theories and legacy in general: often seen as almost bio-deterministic in its focus on innateness and accompanying bodily difference, his work seems strictly confined to its place in the early twentieth century.⁶⁴ On the other hand, many of his theories bear remarkably close resemblance to queer theories later in the twentieth century such as Judith Butler's, with both emphasising the nature of a spectrum, albeit on different levels. While Butler's spectrum plays on the level of gender and completely deconstructs the idea of biological sex, the sex/gender-distinction does not seem at first sight to have been part of Hirschfeld's epistemological toolbox. As the explorations of his vocal theory have shown, and despite the distinctive grounding in medical knowledge, in elements of this theory such as the affordance for vocal closets and the (medically gained) possibility for gender-bending performances, there is an element that is undeniably societal and thus brings the idea of "gender" back into his theories.⁶⁵ Furthermore, even in his early writings, there are elements where societal influence plays a role leading his medical approach to falter slightly. In *Der urnische Mensch*, for example, he describes the difficulty of discerning medical markers from habits and mental issues shaped by homophobia and closet experiences:

"This task [*sc.* to form an opinion about the uranian personality] is complicated by the fact that some things which would not originally be theirs become 'second nature' to them, in response to their situation and through self-discipline and custom."⁶⁶

The notoriously challenging thing that is the voice in particular almost seems to implode his biological determinism from within: as much as Hirschfeld would like to explain vocal differences medically and purely with differences in larynx growth, the lived experiences of singers

62 Freya JARMAN-IVENS, *Queer Voices. Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw* (New York 2011).

63 Ulrich LINKE, *Vokaler Gender Trouble. Wie Queer sind hohe Männerstimmen?* in: Corinna Herr / Arnold Jacobs-hagen / Kai Wessel, eds., *Der Countertenor. Die männliche Falsettstimme vom Mittelalter zur Gegenwart* (Mainz 2012), 215–250.

64 See for example April TRASK, *Remaking Men. Sexology, Homosexuality, and Social Reform in Germany, 1890–1933*, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Irvine 2014), 106.

65 This is despite the fact that Hirschfeld, for example, utters discomfort or even disgust at the sight of bearded uranians in female clothing, perhaps because their gender-bending does not fit into his neat categories of intermediacy. HIRSCHFELD, Berlin, 66 (56).

66 "Diese Aufgabe wird dadurch erschwert, daß vielen Urningen nach Lage der Verhältnisse durch Selbsterziehung und Gewohnheit manches zur „zweiten Natur“ wird, was ihnen ursprünglich nicht zukommt." HIRSCHFELD, *Mensch*, 46.

consciously choosing their falsetto (such as Ulrichs) and training their voice according to societal expectations and personal ideas (such as Sadler-Grün and some case studies in *Die Transvestiten*) force him to acknowledge more discursive influences.

Summary

The voice, especially in liminal and extreme spaces and usages, proves once again to be full of contradictions and negotiations between ideal-typical poles of nature and culture, society and individual, and mind and body. The gendered nature of vocal pitch, as clear as the dichotomy of male/low and female/high might seem at first glance, proves to be more complicated in confrontation with the source material. Linear interpretations are complicated by, for example, the continuous spectrum of pitches in which male and female voice ranges overlap more than in, for example, gendered traditions of dress, and the abovementioned fact that while high tenor notes were praiseworthy, high falsetto notes were ostracised. This very rigid gendered idea is to a certain degree limited to the discourse before roughly 1920, as Roberts rightly points out how crooning and rock falsetto can be expressions of masculinity in a later context.⁶⁷

In Hirschfeld's time and theory, nevertheless, it is this gendered rigidity that forms the link between the voice, queerness, and, via the concept of embodiment, medicine. This embodied view of the voice might not be Sadler-Grün's, striving for artistic expression beyond physical restraints, but paves the way for Hirschfeld's interest and thus a discursively powerful intervention in the interpretation of queer "male" high voices. Hirschfeld's authority as an "independent" medical professional has long been recognised as an important part of his liberationist arguments and a reason for the then surprisingly positive reception of his radical writings in the public sphere. It is, however, not just with his title that Hirschfeld's medical training is of help to his cause: especially with regards to the falsetto voice it can be seen how his use of scientific thinking, or even just his focus on bodily innateness, carves out niches for identification, experimenting, agency, and performative gender-bending, none of which are seen as the traditional realm of medicine in this period or topic. Instead of restricting possibilities to a normatively sanctioned "correct" body, Hirschfeld's positivistic scientific approach opens spaces for agency and exploration by positively employing the label of queerness and renegotiating the idea of illness and the congenital. This focus on innateness is double-edged, as many contemporaries then just started referring to homosexuals as "innocently invalids" (*unschuldig Kranke*) – emphasising how innateness does not necessarily imply acceptance. In this specific context, however, a medical explanation for what otherwise would be considered an irregular voice usage opens new possibilities for exploration and agency, albeit only for a special group of people already in a medical subcategory. It remains significant, however, that when zooming in on cultural and performative experiences like music and liminal spaces between body and culture like the voice, Hirschfeld's seemingly bio-deterministic theory displays its openness and potential for resistance to medical restrictions coming from other areas.

67 ROBERTS, Masculinity, 163–164.

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