Abstract
In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an operatic tradition began that some roles originally intended for male castrato singers were now sung by women. After the disappearance of castrati, these roles were sung entirely by women. Also, gradually during this period, some composers began to write male roles expressly for female singers. Though the term “mezzo-soprano” (medium soprano) was not used until the end of the eighteenth century, that classification describes those women’s voices: a strong middle register with both upper and lower extensions and a richer, darker sound than a soprano (similar to the sound and range of the male castrato). This research project explored how the tradition of “pants roles” began and a time line of the major roles of this type was created and compared to other non-pants mezzo-soprano female roles in the same period. The research team then created a written guide for preparing a “pants role” that includes character study and movement adaptations (how does a man move and how does a woman emulate that physically). The culmination of the project is a lecture recital in which five student mezzo-sopranos will perform examples of major pants roles to illustrate the team’s findings on performing En Travesti.

Research Process
The research team created:
- A lecture on the History of the “pants role”
- The tradition of the travesti came from the decline of the male castrati and the need to fulfill the aesthetic of sexual ambiguity.
- Timeline of major mezzo-soprano roles and pants roles in certain time periods the pants role thrived, while in others it was almost non-existent (i.e. Italian Baroque versus twentieth century American Opera)
- Guide – How To Wear Pants
- Philosophies of three major acting pedagogues
- Laban Movement
- Constantine Stanislavski
- H. W. Blyth
- Acting exercises used to enhance the character
- Introduction to Laban Movement
- Psychology in Movement
- Gender and Movement
- Styles in Opera Acting
- Realism versus Idealism

Examples from How to Wear Pants

Timeline of Travesti Mezzo-Soprano Pants Roles

Application
Based on the three phases of preliminary research, the team then selected and examined individual operas where the pants role was prevalent. The two operatic roles chosen were Serse from Handel’s Serse and Orfeo from Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice. Each team member filled out and completed the guide according to her character.

Presentation of Research
Combining Research and Practice
The student researchers will present their final research project in a lecture recital along with a group of four volunteer student performers, displaying a variety of pants roles while discussing the history and development of the pants role in opera.

Lecture Outline
- Presentation of the history of the pants role
  1. The reasons why women came to play men on stage
     A. Decline of castrati
     B. Vocal chords of castrated man same length as mezzo-soprano’s vocal chords
     C. Sexual Ambiguity
  2. Operas commonly performed today with travesti roles
     a. Styles in acting and how different techniques can be used to enhance the disguise of a woman playing a man
     b. Realism – What the world looks like
     c. Idealism – What the world should look like
  3. Psychology of Movement
     a. Realism versus Idealism
     b. Anatomy of a movement
     c. Understanding the psychology of movement
- How to wear pants
  1. Laban Movement
  2. Language of Movement

Conclusion
After careful examination of the origins of the female travestis, the research team discovered after the decline of the male castrati it was imperative that higher female voices take the place of the once beloved castrato. This maintained the aesthetic of the heroic male lead in a time where the lines of sexual ambiguity were blurred. Further examination of the travesti led to the discovery that the female “hero” is expected to fully embody the male character in present day practice, where realism is preferred to idealism. This ultimately led to the creation of the guide, which includes major acting techniques and exercises on how to “gender bend.” No such source currently exists, making this a valuable contribution to the field. The researchers believe that it is crucial to not only understand the origins of the female travestis, but also to understand how to combine that knowledge with the techniques and concepts provided in the guide to be able to believably portray a male lead on the opera stage.

Questions?
Contact us at msadegh@uwec.edu
Research project and poster printing funded by the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Faculty/Student Collaboration Differential Tuition Grants Program

Examples from How to Wear Pants

Timeline of Mezzo-Soprano Pants Roles

Famous Mezzo-Soprano “Men”

- Kathleen Ferrier
- Brigitte Fassbaender
- Tatiana Troyanos
- Janet Baker
- Marilyn Horne
- Fionnuala de Stedt
- Ann Sophie von Otter

**GOTE Sheet**

**How to do gestures well**

- Choose movement adjectives that can describe your character
- Choose movement adjectives that can describe your character

**Examples from How to Wear Pants**

**Laban Movement**

- A.R.D.
  - Body: Structural and physical characteristics of the body
  - C. Sexual Ambiguity
  - C. Realism versus Idealism
  - C. Realism versus Idealism
  - C. Realism versus Idealism

- B. Realism
  - Anatomy of a movement
  - Anatomy of a movement
  - Anatomy of a movement
  - Anatomy of a movement

- C. Realism versus Idealism
  - Anatomy of a movement
  - Anatomy of a movement
  - Anatomy of a movement
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