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**An investigation into the career trajectories of a select group of spinto,
dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos**

by

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Declaration of originality

I, Frances Muir, declare that the following dissertation, which is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Music (Performing Art), is my own work. Where I have made use of other people's work, it has been referenced in accordance with the School of the Arts requirements.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Frances Muir', written in a cursive style.

Date: 7 May 2021

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Zerlina and Brünnhilde, according to the designations given to them by Mozart and Wagner, are both sopranos. Having Brünnhilde sing “*Batti, batti*” would parallel entering a diesel-powered transport van in the classical Indianapolis 500. Zerlina cannot be put astride Grane for an *Immolation Scene* excursion without being headed for vocal incineration.

– Miller (2000, p. 5)

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Abstract

This study is an investigation into the career trajectories of a select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos. Classically trained voices are classified into broad categories, namely soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and bass. A second-tier classification exists, according to which mainly opera singers are classified, taking into consideration vocal range, weight and colour. The soprano *fächer* that emerge when cross-examining literature pertaining to *fach* include soubrette, lyric coloratura soprano, lyric soprano, spinto soprano, dramatic coloratura soprano, dramatic soprano, and Wagnerian soprano. In the same way, operatic roles are also categorised into *fächer*. *Fach* manuals are available which clearly list operatic roles and the *fach* allocation of each. These manuals enable singers to find roles suited to their own *fach* assignments. Singing roles not suited to one's voice can potentially cause vocal damage. Many young singers with inherent dramatic vocal characteristics struggle with the selection of repertoire for their current vocal developmental stages. It was this observation that led to the decision to investigate the career trajectories of internationally renowned sopranos. The intention was to determine whether they started their careers singing lighter repertoire, or if they sang the heavy repertoire which they are renowned for from the onset of their singing careers. It was found that the overwhelming majority of these sopranos began their careers singing lighter repertoire before progressing to heavier roles. Furthermore, they did not sing exclusively in one *fach*, but rather sang across *fächer* throughout their careers.

Key terms: The German *fach* system, dramatic soprano, spinto soprano, Wagnerian soprano, *fach* changes, voice classification

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

During my undergraduate studies, as my vocal technique improved and my voice matured, it became increasingly clear that I have a voice with inherent dramatic characteristics. To minimise the risk of vocal damage, my voice lecturer warned against singing heavy repertoire too soon. Emphasis was placed on choosing music that would be challenging, yet within the boundaries of my vocal developmental stage. Miller (2000) states that, even though a young “potential dramatic soprano should not be expected to accomplish tasks suited to her soubrette counterpart of the same chronological age” (pp. 5–6), she should avoid singing heavy repertoire, regardless of how lightly she sings it.

I became curious as to whether established female singers endowed with an instrument of substantial size started their operatic careers singing roles in a light to medium *fach*¹ before progressing to heavier *fächer*². Even though I was made aware of this possibility through vocal pedagogy and repertoire studies, it was only once I became involved in opera productions for young singers that I was truly faced with this reality. After completion of my undergraduate studies in music, I attended two summer programmes for young aspiring opera singers, one in the United States of America (USA) and the other in Germany. There I encountered many young sopranos who, like me, wish to pursue an operatic career. I observed that most of the young singers whose voices inherently possess dramatic characteristics struggled with the selection of repertoire which would be healthy and appropriate to sing at their current developmental stages. Many of these sopranos were singing music that could have put undue strain on the vocal mechanism.

¹ Cotton (2007) states that *fach* in the opera world “describes a certain voice category and the roles sung by that type” (p. 55). The German term is widely used in English.

² Plural of *fach*.

Warnings about singing heavy repertoire too early can be found throughout the literature. Doing so can damage a young voice and thus have devastating consequences on the career that a singer wishes to pursue (Edwards, n.d.; Ware, 1998). My interest was piqued, and I decided to investigate the career trajectories of a select group of renowned opera singers who have established themselves in the three heaviest soprano *fächer*: spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos³.

1.2 Contextualisation

According to Miller (2000), laryngeal dimensions and vocal tract constructions differ between sopranos, affecting vocal size and timbre. Singers and their voices develop at different tempos. As a rule, light voices mature faster, whereas this process usually takes longer for more dramatic voices (Brunssen, 2018; Miller, 2000). Singing repertoire beyond a singer's current capabilities can lead to various vocal problems (Jones, 2003). In many instances, voice classification prevents vocal damage by helping singers find their niche and guiding them to appropriate repertoire for their current vocal developmental stages (Hoch & Lister, 2016). Since the German *fach* system is the most relied-upon voice classification system, and there are more performance opportunities for singers in Germany than anywhere else in the world (Operabase, 2019), it is used in this study. The German *fach* system categorises opera roles into specific voice types, known as *fächer* (DeWood, n.d.).

The German *fach* system contains seven soprano *fächer*: soubrette, lyric coloratura soprano, lyric soprano, spinto soprano, dramatic coloratura soprano, dramatic soprano, and Wagnerian soprano (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016; Malone, 2011; Miller, 2000). To a certain extent, classification is a safety net for singers, as they are not usually expected to perform roles outside of their *fach* allocation, minimising the risk of singing roles that go beyond their vocal abilities (Miller, 1996). To classify a voice, singers and singing teachers must consider various factors, including vocal physiology and factors pertaining to vocal technique. Singers are born with an inherent vocal construction (McGinnis, 2010), meaning that their predetermined genetic makeup

³ The German terms are *Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran*, *Dramatischer Sopran* and *Hochdramatischer Sopran* respectively (DeWood, n.d.; Dillon, 2009; Vincent, 2010).

influences their range, tessitura and timbre, ultimately determining a singer's *fach* (Miller, 2000). However, until sufficient technical skill has been established, *fach* allocation should be avoided, as poor technique can mask the real qualities of a voice (Miller, 2000). Sopranos with improper technique and those with inherent dramatic qualities are sometimes misclassified as mezzo-sopranos (Miller, 1996). Therefore, classification should not take place while the singer is too young and the technique underdeveloped.

Although there is a substantial amount of literature about the importance of appropriate repertoire selection, the German *fach* system, soprano *fächer*, as well as the classification and misclassification of voices, my research to date did not uncover any study regarding potential patterns that could emerge from documenting the career trajectories of a select group of renowned sopranos established in the three heaviest *fächer*. Determining if singers, as a rule, sang heavy repertoire from a young age or began their careers singing lighter repertoire, and whether they sing strictly within the boundaries of a single *fach*, or if those lines are blurred, would fill the existing research gap. Studying the career trajectories of established spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos will also be of value to young singers with inherent dramatic voices, as it may provide a glimpse into their future career paths.

1.3 Research questions

1.3.1 Main research question

What can be learnt from an investigation into the career trajectories of a select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos?

1.3.2 Secondary research questions

- In which *fach* did the select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos sing during the early stages of their careers?
- In which *fach* did this select group of sopranos sing during the later stages of their careers?
- To what extent did these sopranos sing across *fächer*?

1.4 Aims of the study

The main aim of this study is to document the career trajectories of a select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos in order to discover whether they started their careers singing lighter repertoire, or whether they sang the heavy repertoire which they are renowned for from the onset of their singing careers. Furthermore, the aim is to identify potential patterns regarding *fach* changes throughout the careers of these sopranos, which could guide the repertoire selection for young sopranos with potentially large voices.

1.5 Central theoretical argument

My assumption is that a number of opera singers begin their careers singing in lighter *fächer* than those which they ultimately, at the height of their careers, become known for and that they did or do not always limit themselves to singing exclusively in one *fach*.

1.6 Research methodology

This is a qualitative research study. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), the purpose of qualitative research is not to find one specific answer to a question, but rather to explore literature relating to the research question and to interpret the information retrieved. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is appropriate for this study, as the aim is to investigate, document and compare the career trajectories of nine sopranos to determine the extent to which they changed *fach* throughout their respective careers and if they strictly limited themselves to one *fach*, or sang across *fächer*. For the purposes of this study, it was decided that three singers from each *fach* would be investigated, including at least one singer who currently has an active career and one whose career was prominent during the mid-twentieth century. The third singer could fall in either of these two categories.

The guiding principles of qualitative content analysis were followed. Qualitative content analysis refers to the collection, investigation, and documentation of recorded information in the form of texts, physical items, or media, which is then moulded into data (IOWA State University, 2020;

Schreier, 2012). The information about each singer was gathered from existing literature and organised chronologically into tables. Each table includes the following headings: year role was debuted, age, year(s) role repeated, role, opera, composer and *fach*. Representing the collected data in a table format allows for the identification of similarities, differences and other emerging patterns.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Only secondary data sources were used in the study. Nevertheless, as it is an investigation into the careers of a group of opera singers, I was cautious about treating the information accurately, fairly and objectively, as not to negatively impact these singers' reputation. Triangulation was used to ensure credibility by means of cross-checking facts (Bryman et al., 2014). Only facts substantiated through perusal of multiple sources, including newspaper clippings, online opera archives, YouTube videos and books written by reputable authors, were considered. The findings were represented factually and objectively to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the results.

1.8 Limitations and delimitations of the study

Finding sufficient information was the primary limitation of this study. Not all the sopranos discussed in this study were selected from the outset. Some sopranos initially selected were removed from the study due to the lack of reliable information regarding their opera performances. To assure the reliability of the study, these singers were replaced with others whose information is readily available to retain the sample size of nine sopranos. Furthermore, not all opera houses have an online database from which each singer's performance records can be gathered. In an effort to overcome this limitation, each opera house was contacted for the relevant information; however, not all responded.

Studies require boundaries to ensure that they remain specific to the research topic (Bak, 2004). Therefore, of the different voice groups, only sopranos were investigated for this study. A total of nine sopranos were considered: three spinto sopranos, three dramatic sopranos and three Wagnerian sopranos, all of whom have or had international operatic careers, performing at the most prestigious opera houses in the world. Only the databases of the most prestigious opera

houses were used to gather each singer's performance history. No singers classified in any other *fach* were included in the study. Performances of *Lieder*, operettas and any other non-operatic performances fall outside the parameters of this study.

1.9 Value of the study

The study is centred on the possibility of *fach* changes throughout a singer's career. The findings may benefit young sopranos with inherent dramatic voices in selecting appropriate repertoire for their current developmental stages. Gaining knowledge about the German *fach* system and learning from the careers of internationally renowned sopranos can inform young singers about the possible *fach* changes that could occur during a career as the technique settles and the voice matures. Observing the repertoire selections through *fach* changes of internationally renowned sopranos may assist in attaining vocal longevity.

1.10 Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Introduction – A background to the study and the motivation behind the chosen topic is provided. The study is contextualised, followed by the research questions. The aims of the study are then stated, proceeded by the central theoretical argument and outline of the methodology. Finally, the ethical considerations, limitations and delimitations, as well as the value of the study conclude the chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature review – The literature review includes information about the dangers of singing heavy repertoire too early, the German *fach* system, soprano *fächer*, and the classification and misclassification of voices.

Chapter 3: Research methodology – This chapter explains the research approach and design, how the research was conducted, as well as the data collection and analysis techniques used in this study.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings – The data collected for this study is presented in this chapter. The spinto sopranos are discussed first, followed by the dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos. In each category, they are discussed chronologically. Following a brief biography of the singers, the data is presented in table format.

Chapter 5: Summary and conclusion – In this chapter, the study is summarised and the findings of the research are discussed and situated within the discipline, as found through an investigation of the existing literature. Recommendations for further study are provided, concluding the chapter and study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

It is widely recognised that singing dramatic repertoire from a young age, before a singer's technique is sufficiently developed and settled, can be detrimental to the voice, as doing so can potentially cause extensive vocal damage (Jones, 2003; Jung, 2010). The German *fach* system can be used by teachers and singers as a valuable guide for repertoire selection, as it categorises operatic roles and arias into vocal *fächer*. These topics will be discussed in this chapter and the soprano *fächer* will be explained. Finally, the challenges of voice classification will be explored in terms of physiological and technical considerations, and the dangers of misclassification will be explained.

2.1 The dangers of singing heavy repertoire too early

The esteemed voice teacher David Jones (2003) issues a stern warning regarding the consequences of singing heavy repertoire with a lyric voice by relating his experience with a young lyric soprano. Disregarding his advice, she decided to sing Wagnerian repertoire, and within a few weeks, she was unable to sing *pianissimo* and had developed audible register breaks. Jones (2003) further explains that other vocal problems can arise when singing repertoire which is too heavy for a specific voice, including “vocal fatigue, register imbalance, vibrato problems, breath problems, and usually tremendous tongue tension” (para. 3). Jung (2010) agrees that appropriate repertoire selection is crucial for developing young voices and that vocal damage can occur when young singers attempt to sing heavy repertoire without sufficient training.

Young singers often have a desire to become successful as soon as possible (Jung, 2010). They are frequently inspired to pursue an operatic career after experiencing a moving performance by a mature opera singer, and often attempt to sing the arias and mimic the operatic sound they heard. They do not consider the significant training, years of artistic and vocal development, and maturity required to make the music seem effortless. Young singers need to be careful not only to avoid mimicking mature opera singers but also to choose appropriate repertoire for their current developmental stage (Jung, 2010). Due to the fact that the voice has not yet reached maturity and

the technique is not fully established in young singers, the challenges posed by operatic music, such as a wide range, extreme dynamics, sustained high or low tessituras and long phrases, are still beyond the capabilities of a young singer (Jung, 2010). In addition, orchestration in arias for dramatic voices is often heavy and dense. If the voice is either not suited to the music or ready to sing it, a singer will push the voice in an effort to be heard above the orchestra. Over time, this will inevitably lead to vocal problems or injuries (Jung, 2010).

To minimise the danger of causing vocal damage, it is the singer's responsibility to study the functioning of the vocal instrument and how to use it in a healthy manner (Grussl, 2019; Koehler, 2003). Studying vocal pedagogy will provide a young singer with knowledge about the physiology of the voice, vocal training and how to take care of the voice (Miller, 2000). Furthermore, it is essential for all young singers to have a knowledgeable mentor to guide repertoire selection which will be healthy and conducive to the various stages of vocal and technical development. Creating a list of appropriate repertoire for all young singers is not viable, because voices are unique and develop at different tempos (Miller, 2000). Although a standard repertoire list cannot exist for all singers, Ragan (2016) believes that repertoire selection guidelines serve the purpose of steering young singers in the right direction. Age as well as technical ability and challenges should be considered first; however, appropriate repertoire for a young soprano should not only promote technical, but also musical development (Brunssen, 2018; Jung, 2010). Music that does not challenge a singer sufficiently is often perceived as boring, whereas music beyond a singer's technical abilities can be psychologically defeating (Nix, 2002). Therefore, guiding singers towards "appropriate repertoire without dampening their enthusiasm for music" (Jung, 2010, p. 3) is essential. Not only should singing teachers consider the above guidelines when selecting appropriate repertoire for their students, but they should also consider that, as singers develop, their voices could change in unique ways, perhaps even to the extent of changing *fach*. Therefore, it is beneficial to have a thorough understanding of the German *fach* system.

The classification of a voice into a *fach* may help a soprano find appropriate repertoire for her specific voice (Hoch & Lister, 2016). According to Operabase (2019), Germany staged more operas than any other country during the 2018–2019 season. Since there are more performances per season in Germany than anywhere else globally, performance opportunities for operas singers

are more abundant in this country. A thorough understanding of the German *fach* system is essential for young singers wishing to perform there (McGinnis, 2010).

2.2 The German *fach* system

The German *fach* system refers to the voice classification system used in German opera houses⁴ where, since the early nineteenth century, it has been typical to cast singers in repertory opera, which refers to the rotation of a setlist of operas performed over many months or years by an opera company (DeWood, n.d.). For example, if an opera company included *Die Zauberflöte*, *La Bohème* and *Carmen*⁵ as part of their setlist, they would require a soprano who is able to sing the roles of Pamina, Mimì, and Micaëla. Singers are often replaced due to contracts ending or retirement, in which case newly appointed singers who could sing the same selection of roles would proceed (DeWood, n.d.). This ensures that opera companies continually have a group of singers from which to cast operas.

With the establishment of the German *fach* system in the early twentieth century, casting repertory opera was simplified. The German *fach* system features categories of voice types, known as *fächer*, under which opera roles are listed with similar ranges, tessitura and timbre demands inherent in the score (DeWood, n.d.; Jarvis, 1987). Once a voice has been categorised in a specific *fach*, she⁶ would be expected to learn and perform roles within that *fach* (DeWood, n.d.). Hiring singers based on *fach* provides peace of mind to opera houses, as they know that they have singers available who can sing a specific selection of repertoire. Equally, singers are reassured that they will only be expected to sing repertoire within their *fach* (McGinnis, 2010; Vincent, 2010). Singers sign contracts with opera companies based on their *fach* allocation (Cotton, 2007). If someone is considered a lyric soprano, she would be expected to sing any role that is listed in that *fach*.

⁴ For the purposes of this study, German opera houses refer to the those in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, where German is the primary language and the same German *fach* system is used (McGinnis, 2010).

⁵ Three of the most-performed operas worldwide in the 2018–2019 opera season (Operabase, 2019).

⁶ As this study concerns sopranos, the female pronouns are used.

Miller (1996) refers to the *fach* system as a safety net that could help protect a singer's voice, as it minimises the chances that she would be expected to sing a role that does not suit her vocal abilities and could thus cause vocal damage. Koehler (2003) suggests that classifying voices is a commercial convenience rather than a vocal necessity. She believes that, although a singer is classified into a *fach* and considered capable of singing the allocated repertoire without causing vocal damage, not all roles within that *fach* may suit her voice. It is also possible that other roles from adjacent *fächer* may complement her voice more than some of the roles in her allocated *fach* (Jarvis, 1987). Regardless of whether specific roles suit her voice or not, the opera company would still expect her to perform roles within the *fach* stipulated in her contract (Koehler, 2003).

It is difficult to substantiate Koehler's (2003) statement, as an extensive search of the literature did not provide an argument for or against her point of view. Whether the classification of voices is for the convenience of opera houses or not, it does help to direct singers to appropriate repertoire selection, especially when choosing music for recitals, auditions and career planning (Cotton, 2007; Jarvis, 1987; Malone, 2011). A singer's audition package should ideally contain repertoire that falls within one *fach* (Koehler, 2003), as presenting a narrow selection of repertoire avoids confusion. It indicates to the audition panel that the singer understands her instrument, is well-prepared, and is knowledgeable about the opera industry. Often, any indication of inappropriate repertoire selection results in the exclusion of singers from auditions. This is necessary to reduce applicants, as it saves opera companies time and money (Cotton, 2007). Not only does the German *fach* system aid singers in the selection of audition repertoire, but it also guides them towards lesser-known operatic roles, because *fach* manuals include not only standard repertoire, but also the not-so-standard repertoire (DeWood, n.d.; Malone, 2011).

McGinnis (2010) opines that Kloiber's (2006⁷) *Handbuch der Oper* "is considered the standard reference in all matters concerning *Fach* categories" (p. 17). In agreement with McGinnis, Hohenberger (2018) states that the Kloiber's manual "is the definitive complete manual on voice

⁷ The eleventh edition, which is the one referred to by McGinnis, was published in 2006. Although McGinnis (2010) refers to it as Kloiber's manual, Konold and Maschka are contributing authors. The most recent edition was published in 2016, also by Kloiber, Konold and Maschka. It is from the later edition that information for this study was garnered.

types, auditioning, and roles” (par. 8). When writing his manual, Kloiber used a combination of the opinions of opera directors, conductors and singers, as well as his highly regarded knowledge of the operatic repertoire. Not only does this manual stipulate the *fach* allocation of opera roles, it also provides information about each opera, including a synopsis, setting, history, *libretto* origin, and the historical style of the music (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016; McGinnis, 2010). There are twenty-five *fächer* defined in Kloiber’s manuals, however, the number of *fächer* differ to some extent from one country to the next (Vincent, 2010). Steane (1992), Malone (2011) and Cotton (2007) agree that in Germany and most of Europe, Kloiber, Konold and Maschka’s (2016) guide to *fach* is mostly used, whereas in America, Boldrey’s (1994) guide is more commonly relied upon. According to Cotton (2012), the main difference between the two is that Boldrey offers considerably more vocal subdivisions than Kloiber, Konold and Maschka.

2.3 Soprano *fächer*

According to DeWood (n.d.), there are more soprano *fächer* than any other voice type, “due partly to the extreme range of styles, characters, age, etc[.] written into the soprano registers” (p. 6). It could also be because there are more roles in opera for sopranos than any other voice type (DeWood, n.d.). Seven soprano *fächer* emerge when cross-examining literature pertaining to *fach*: soubrette, lyric coloratura soprano, lyric soprano, spinto soprano, dramatic coloratura soprano, dramatic soprano and Wagnerian soprano (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016; Malone, 2011; Miller, 2000). The fact that various subdivisions of these *fächer* are to be found, illustrates the confusion that often reigns as far as voice classification is concerned. These subdivisions include: light lyric coloratura soprano, full lyric coloratura soprano, light lyric soprano, full lyric soprano, lyric spinto soprano, light dramatic coloratura soprano, full dramatic coloratura soprano, light dramatic soprano, full dramatic soprano, character soprano and *Zwischenfachsängerin*⁸ (Boldrey, 1994; DeWood, n.d.; McGinnis, 2010). For the purposes of this study, only the *fächer* identified

⁸ A *Zwischenfachsängerin* singer does not belong to one *fach* but sings across *fächer* (Boldrey, 1994; McGinnis, 2010; Miller, 2000).

by Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Malone (2011) and Miller (2000) will be considered. The main soprano *fächer* will now be discussed.

2.3.1 Soubrette

According to Miller (2000), the soubrette is the most commonly found and lightest female *fach*. Although the soubrette is characterised by a relatively light voice, the sound must be able to carry over an orchestra with a flexible and bright tone (DeWood, n.d.; McGinnis, 2010). She should also be a good actress, as she often portrays a comedic character (Malone, 2011; McGinnis, 2010). Sometimes the soubrette's acting ability is considered even more important than her vocal prowess, in which case she is considered a *Spielsopran*, or acting soprano (McGinnis, 2010). Soubrette roles include Papagena (*Die Zauberflöte*), Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Gianetta (*Liebestrank*) and Oscar (*Un ballo in maschera*) (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.2 Lyric coloratura soprano

A lyric coloratura soprano is capable of notable vocal agility (McGinnis, 2010), referring to the ability to sing successive notes within passages rapidly and effortlessly (Bickel, 2008). Her voice is not only agile, but also bright and strong in the extended upper register, perfectly suited to early music (Jarvis, 1987). A lyric coloratura soprano often plays young heroines who manipulate other characters and set up the drama (McGinnis, 2010). Norina (*Don Pasquale*), Musetta (*La Bohème*), Zerbinetta (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Marie (*La Fille du Régiment*) are examples of lyric coloratura soprano roles (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.3 Dramatic coloratura soprano

Although both the dramatic coloratura soprano and the lyric coloratura soprano possess agile voices, the former's voice is substantially larger than her lyric coloratura soprano counterpart (Miller, 2000). Dramatic coloratura sopranos have a strong upper register, a warm timbre throughout the range and a large breath capacity (DeWood, n.d.). Roles for the dramatic coloratura soprano include Königin der Nacht (*Die Zauberflöte*), Violetta Valéry (*La Traviata*), Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor, and Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*) (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.4 Lyric soprano

The lyric soprano must be able to sing long *legato* lines (Malone, 2011). She has a warm timbre and a rich middle register (DeWood, n.d.; Jarvis, 1987). Lyric sopranos are not expected to sing as high as a lyric coloratura soprano nor as many rapid passages (Malone, 2011). Roles composed for lyric sopranos include Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Liù (*Turandot*), Micaëla (*Carmen*) and Echo (*Arabella*) (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.5 Spinto soprano

The term spinto means pushed in Italian (Malone, 2011). The spinto soprano is often a young dramatic soprano who, like the lyric soprano, sings long *legato* lines, but whose voice has more weight (McGinnis, 2010). Her voice must be audible above large orchestras and is ideal for singing the *verismo* soprano roles of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (Miller, 2000). Maddalena di Coigny (*Andrea Chénier*), Elsa (*Lohengrin*), Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly*), Ponchielli's La Gioconda and Janáček's Jenůfa are listed in the spinto soprano *fach* (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.6 Dramatic soprano

A dramatic soprano possesses a powerful voice characterised by substantial weight and often metallic timbre (DeWood, n.d.; Miller, 2000). She can sing over thick orchestration, is expected to be able to sing heavy repertoire for a substantial length of time and often sings the music of Verdi (Malone, 2011; McGinnis, 2010). Jarvis (1987) suggests that 'drama' is the keyword in understanding the dramatic soprano *fach*, as the roles in this *fach* "are the most demanding emotionally" (p. 38). Roles for dramatic sopranos include Santuzza (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), Leonore (*Fidelio*), Puccini's Tosca and Verdi's Aïda (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016).

2.3.7 Wagnerian soprano

Wagnerian sopranos have the largest soprano voices and sing almost exclusively romantic and post-romantic German repertoire (DeWood, n.d.; Malone, 2011; McGinnis, 2010). A Wagnerian

soprano can sing sustained passages and has a strong middle and low register which can be heard above the typically rich and complex Wagnerian orchestration (Malone, 2011). The roles of Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre* and *Die Götterdämmerung*), Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*), and Kundry (*Parsifal*) were composed for this type of voice (Malone, 2011; McGinnis, 2010; Miller, 2000).

2.4 The classification of voices

While studying the literature pertaining to assigning voices and roles to specific categories, the prevalence of the terms ‘voice classification’ and ‘*fach*’ became apparent. Cotton (2007) states that voice classification and *fach* are not interchangeable terms. Her argument is that voice classification refers to the “capabilities and limitations of an instrument” (Cotton, 2007, p. 3), whereas *fach* is mainly used to describe the allocation of roles to singers whose voices suit the vocal demands inherent in the score and the casting preferences of a specific moment in time (Cotton, 2012). Changes in taste and trends can be seen in the various editions of *Handbuch der Oper* (Kloiber, 1973; Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016). In the 1973 edition, Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) is listed as either a dramatic contralto or mezzo-soprano role, whereas in the 2016 edition, it is listed as a lyric mezzo-soprano role. Similarly, in the 1973 edition, Sextus (*La clemenza di Tito*) is categorised as a dramatic soprano role, and in 2016 as lyric mezzo-soprano role. Apart from casting preferences, there are various factors to consider when classifying a voice, such as vocal physiology and factors pertaining to vocal technique.

2.4.1 Physiological considerations

No amount of training will enable all sopranos to evolve from a soubrette to a Wagnerian soprano because “the category (*Fach*) of each female voice is largely determined by the physiology of the instrument itself” (Miller, 2000, p. 5). McGinnis (2010) agrees when stating that the size (referring to volume and dramatic effect) of a singer’s voice is an inherent characteristic. According to Sataloff (2017), laryngeal characteristics are already developed by the time a fetus is three months old. Singers are born with a predetermined genetic makeup which influences the quality and capabilities of their voices. Genetics effect the length and width of the vocal folds, size of the

larynx, consistency of mucus, the size and shape of resonators, and physical build, including the height and lung capacity of a singer (Bickel, 2008; Chagnon, 1998; McGinnis, 2010).

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the correlation between vocal fold length and voice classification. Males have longer vocal folds (18–24mm) than females (14–19mm), which corresponds to males having lower voices (Chagnon, 1998). Both Benninghoff (2003) and Roers, Mürbe and Sundberg (2009) found differences in vocal fold length between sopranos and altos⁹. Benninghoff (2003) states that there is a 5mm difference in vocal fold length, while Roers et al. (2009) state that the difference is only 1.8mm. Roers et al. (2009) criticise Benninghoff's (2003) results due to a lack of description of his methodology.

Vocal fold length determines which of the primary voice classification categories a voice belongs to, namely soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone or bass (Benninghoff, 2003; Roers et al., 2009). However, not all researchers agree with these categories, and discrepancies in the literature occur, including the addition of the female contralto and male bass-baritone to the primary categories (Bickel, 2008; Cotton, 2012; Miller, 2000; Miller, 2008). Once the primary classification has taken place, a singer's range, tessitura, timbre, and location of the *passaggi*¹⁰ will help a teacher with *fach* assignment of the voice. McGinnis (2010) provides an equation for determining *fach*: "*Fach* = voice [genetic makeup] + range + size + timbre + physical build" (p. 7).

Miller (2000) states that the range and timbre of a singer's voice are determined mainly by the construction of the vocal mechanism. Range refers to how low and high a singer can sing (Cotton, 2007), however, range alone cannot be the determinant of either voice type or *fach*. Cases in point are the world-renowned mezzo-sopranos Cecilia Bartoli and Joyce DiDonato, both having vocal ranges similar to sopranos and are occasionally cast in roles traditionally assigned to sopranos (The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^a; The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^e). Tessitura, often considered a subcategory of range, refers to the area within a singer's range that can be accessed

⁹ Altos is a term used in choirs to describe a low female voice (Augstyn et al., 2011).

¹⁰ *Passaggi* (plural of *passaggio*) refer to the two register transitions in a singer's voice (according to the three-register theory) and occur between the chest and middle voice, and the middle and head voice (Chapman, 2017).

with the most ease and consistency (Chagnon, 1998; McGinnis, 2010). The timbre of a singer's voice is partly owed to the size and shape of the pharynx, larynx, nasal cavities, and mouth (Bickel, 2008). No two people have the same body and, likewise, no two people have the same vocal mechanism.

By approximately the age of twenty, the laryngeal cartilage, vocal folds and shape of a soprano's vocal tract has reached full maturation (Brunssen, 2018). However, throughout a singer's lifetime, vocal physiological changes occur, which includes the descent of the larynx. This influences range, which gradually lowers (Sataloff, 2017). Changes also occur in the vocal tract, particularly the ratio between cartilage and vocal fold membrane (Bos, Frazier-Neely & Bozeman, 2020). At birth, these ratios are equal, however, when an adult reaches vocal maturity, "three fifths of the vocal fold length is membranous" (Sataloff, 2017, p. 123). Resonance is directly impacted by these changes in the vocal tract, often resulting in a richer vocal timbre (Bos, Frazier-Neely & Bozeman, 2020). Although the literature provides valuable information about the structure and functioning of the vocal mechanism and respiratory systems, it does not describe or accurately pinpoint how singers in various *fächer* differ physiologically from one another.

2.4.2 Technical considerations

Until a singer has developed and established a strong, healthy vocal technique, *fach* allocation might be difficult and should be avoided. Miller (2000) believes that sufficient technical skill must be accomplished before *fach* association can truly be revealed. Range, tessitura and timbre can all be influenced by technique. Joan Sutherland, a renowned dramatic coloratura soprano during the second half of the twentieth century, was initially classified as a mezzo-soprano, as her range was limited due to poor technique (Bickel, 2008). Once she had freed the voice of muscular tension, her upper range opened, revealing the inherent qualities of her voice.

According to Bickel (2008), the voice must be free of tension and all registers should be accessible before classification is attempted. However, sopranos must keep in mind that, regardless of how stable their technique may be, it does not make them vocally capable of taking on all facets of the soprano repertoire (Miller, 2000). Vocal technique allows the inherent vocal qualities to be

revealed, but it is apparent that the physiology of the voice is the main determinant of *fach* (Cotton, 2007).

2.5 The misclassification of voices

Voice classification is often a contentious issue as there is a substantial amount of disagreement regarding classification criteria and whether classification should play a role in a singer's training (Cotton, 2007). McKinney (2005) believes that teachers should easily be able to determine if a student is either a soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone or bass. However, according to Vincent (2010), misclassification of young singers can occur even within the primary categories, as voices develop in different ways and each matures at its own tempo. Miller (1996) warns that problems with misclassification often occur when a young soprano has a larger instrument in relation to her peers; her instrument "has more depth of quality than most of her soprano peers, [and] she is told by some that she is a mezzo-soprano" (p. 201). In addition, young singers with inherent dramatic characteristics often develop at a slower tempo than their lighter-voiced counterparts. This sometimes causes uncertainty about the repertoire these singers should sing, and the darker tone quality of their voices lead to the mezzo-soprano classification (Jarvis, 1987; Miller, 2000).

Ghena Dimitrova (1941–2005) and Nina Stemme (1963–) made their opera debuts singing lyric mezzo-soprano repertoire, yet became prominent sopranos throughout their careers (The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^c; The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.ⁱ). Jarvis (1987) refers to a singer who began her career singing lyric mezzo-soprano repertoire before developing into a dramatic soprano as a 'transitional singer'. Transitional singers often have higher ranges than mezzo-sopranos but are not capable of sustained high tessitura. For that reason, they are often considered mezzo-sopranos, although it is agreed that this is a form of misclassification (Jarvis, 1987).

Young singers eager to audition for opera houses often put pressure on their teachers to classify their voices in order to know which roles are appropriate for them. However, classifying young voices too early should be avoided, as technical and laryngeal development still occurs while the student is young (Chapman, 2017). Miller (1996) argues that young singers do not yet have a

mastery of vocal technique, which makes *fach* assignment difficult. A soprano must wait until her technique has developed sufficiently before she is able to determine which *fach* she belongs to (Miller, 1996). However, technical development is partly dependent on laryngeal development. Ware (1998) states that smaller voices do not show their full vocal quality until a singer's mid-twenties and larger voices not until their mid-thirties. Changes occur due to ossification in the cricoid and thyroid cartilages during a singer's early twenties, and in the arytenoid cartilages during their later thirties (Sataloff, 2017). Therefore, there should be no rush to classify young voices; once a *fach* allocation has taken place, a soprano should keep in mind that her *fach* may change (Bickel, 2008; Vennard, 1957).

Although opera companies and singers widely rely upon the German *fach* system, it can be difficult for teachers and young singers to identify to which *fach* a singer belongs. However, it is ultimately necessary for a singer to acquaint herself with the system and eventually, with reliable guidance, determine her vocal *fach*.

2.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the dangers of singing heavy repertoire, the German *fach* system, soprano *fächer* and the classification and misclassification of voices were discussed. The discussion began with the reasons why young singers should be wary of singing heavy repertoire. The classification of voices helps to guide them towards appropriate repertoire choices. The German *fach* system section provided information on how the system was established and why it is useful and helpful to singers, teachers and opera house managements. The different *fach* manuals were briefly discussed, and the seven soprano *fächer* identified by Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Malone (2011) and Miller (2000) were named, then discussed. The characteristics of the seven most prominent soprano *fächer* were described, and several roles appropriate for each *fach* were provided.

A discussion on the classification and misclassification of voices followed. The classification of voices was separated into two sections, namely physiological and technical considerations. It became apparent that the characteristics of a voice are predetermined by the physiological

construction of the vocal mechanism, which changes throughout people's lives. However, the real qualities of a voice only become apparent after vocal technique has been established and grasped. Classifying a voice before a student has a steady technique or has matured leads to misclassification or vocal harm. Larger voices can sometimes be misclassified into the mezzo-soprano category. Such premature classification is dangerous if the voice has not fully matured.

Chapter 3 – Research methodology

In this chapter, the research approach, research design and data collection techniques of the study will be discussed.

3.1 Research approach

A qualitative approach was used for this study. Qualitative research is described as an investigation into a small group of people with the intention of learning as much as one can about them (Nieuwenhuis, 2016; Roberts, 2010). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), the purpose of qualitative research is not to find one specific answer to a question, but rather to explore literature relating to the research question and interpreting the information retrieved. Therefore, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study, which is an investigation into, documentation and comparison of the career trajectories of nine sopranos, each of whom became known for singing in the three heaviest soprano *fächer*. The aim was to determine the extent to which they changed *fach* throughout their respective careers.

3.2 Research design

This study follows the guiding principles of content analysis. Unlike other qualitative research designs, content analysis reduces the amount of data presented by focusing only on aspects related to the research questions (Schreier, 2013). Qualitative content analysis refers to the collection, investigation and documentation of recorded information in the form of texts, physical items or media releases, which is then moulded into data (IOWA State University, 2020; Schreier, 2012). The extracted data is subsequently examined to identify potential patterns (Bryman et al., 2014). Using content analysis was appropriate for this study because information about each singer was gathered from the existing literature and subsequently reduced to only present information regarding the roles each singer sang during their respective careers. The data was then examined with the intention of answering the research questions guiding the study.

3.3 Data collection techniques

When using a content analysis design, information regarding the research questions can be extracted from various types of literature (IOWA State University, 2020; Maier, 2018). For the purposes of this study, secondary sources including biographies, newspaper articles, interview transcriptions, and opera posters and archives were consulted. The gathered information was organised into the following topics: the dangers of singing heavy repertoire too early, the German *fach* system, soprano *fächer*, and the classification and misclassification of singers.

Chapter four includes a discussion of the career trajectories of a select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos. When deciding which sopranos should be investigated, the primary selection criteria were that the roles they became primarily known for should fall within the spinto, dramatic or Wagnerian soprano *fächer*. A combination of the following two matters were considered to determine which *fach* each singer belongs to: the roles she performs or performed most often; and public opinion, including reviews about her performances of the specific roles. Three singers from each *fach* were investigated in this study, including at least one singer who currently has an active career and one whose career was prominent during the mid-twentieth century and since then has retired. The third singer could fall in either of these two categories. Singers from different generations and countries were chosen to determine if patterns might emerge which differ between the current crop of singers and previous generations. This information was analysed and interpreted within the context of the information presented in the literature review.

Data retrieved from the interview transcriptions in Rasponi's (1994) tome, *The last prima donnas*, added a wealth of information about the generation of opera singers who dominated the international stages from the early twentieth century to the mid-1960s. Rasponi was a socialite, writer, publicity agent and opera critic, whose interviews with fifty-five singers of this bygone era offer first-hand accounts of their careers. His in-depth interviews with many of the most influential female singers of the time was the point of departure to select singers of the mid-twentieth century. The information garnered from these personal interviews helped gain insight into the performance histories of the women and first-hand accounts of repertoire choices made by them. In addition,

research by other biographers, such as Feeney (2019), Hermann (2004), LeSueur (2019), and Oron (2001^{a&b}), as well as the archives of major opera houses, were consulted.

The birth of the internet in 1983¹¹, which came about between the active performance periods of the current and previous generations of singers, had a significant impact on the ease of finding information about these two groups of sopranos. Many opera companies have online databases, which made it possible to conduct a reliable search of the performance history of a specific singer at a specific opera house. Online sources, particularly biographies, specify the different opera houses at which each singer had performed. I consequently visited the online databases of these opera companies to gather information about a specific singer's performance history with the company. However, it became apparent that some online databases are not complete, only go back to a certain date, and therefore do not include every performance staged since the opera house opened. The absence of complete performance histories and archives affected the data collection on the twentieth-century singers. In an attempt to overcome this challenge, the opera houses were contacted for the relevant information, however, few responses were received. Where necessary, the information about the roles these singers performed throughout their careers was gathered from published biographies.

3.4 Data analysis

Analysis of the collected data aims to present results in such a way that the research questions can be answered (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). According to Bryman et al. (2014), content analysis refers to the examination of information extracted from existing sources and presented in a clear way, such as in tables and graphs, to identify emerging patterns. Therefore, information about each singer was gathered and organised chronologically into the following table:

¹¹ 1 January 1983 is considered the official date of the birth of the internet (Burtle et al., n.d.).

Table heading: *Chronological order of the roles performed by (singer's name)*

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i>

Representing the collected data in a table allows for similarities or emerging patterns to be identified. Patterns of particular importance for this study were those that indicated if, when, and to what extent the singers changed *fach* as their careers progressed. These results could be of educational value to young sopranos with potentially large voices and can possibly guide them towards making healthy and appropriate repertoire choices.

Since Kloiber's *Handbuch der Oper* is highly regarded in matters relating to *fach* (Hohenberger, 2018; McGinnis, 2010), the most recent version, written in 2016, was consulted for the allocation of roles in this study. Furthermore, as stated in chapter two, it is possible for one role to be listed in two *fächer*, as in the case of Mimì (*La Bohème*) which is in both the lyric and spinto soprano *fächer* (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016). When this occurs, both *fächer* are stated in the same order it appears in the manual.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter commenced with a discussion of the suitability of a qualitative approach for this study. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research centres on a group of sopranos, with the intention of learning as much about their career trajectories as possible. The study follows the guiding principles of content analysis, because the information about the singers was gathered from a variety of sources and moulded into data. The limitations encountered during the data collection process were briefly discussed, along with the attempts to overcome these challenges. Finally, the design was presented for the tables in which the collected data was entered to facilitate data analysis.

Chapter 4 – Data analysis and findings

In this chapter, the career trajectories of the nine sopranos who were selected for this study are presented in table format. The singers are categorised according to the *fach* they became internationally renowned for, either spinto, dramatic or Wagnerian soprano, regardless of whether they also sang roles belonging in other *fächer*. The previous generation of singers were categorised based on Rasponi's (1994) classification which, to a great extent, was how the singers viewed their own voices. Within each *fach*, the singers are discussed in chronological order. Following a brief biography of the soprano in question, a table is provided which presents the collected data. Each biography mentions her operatic debut, most performed role(s) and final role debuted. The information provided is centred on the roles they performed throughout their careers in the most prestigious opera houses, specifically stating when each role was debuted and the years during which it was repeated. If a role was not repeated, the column was left blank; if the literature states that a role was repeated but no specific date is available, the entry in the column is "unknown". The tables allow for the identification of any potential patterns that might emerge from the data.

4.1 Career trajectories of the selected spinto sopranos

4.1.1 Renata Tebaldi

Renata Ersilia Clotilde Tebaldi was born 1 February 1922 in Pesaro, Italy, and died 19 December 2004 in the Republic of San Marino (Augstyn et al., 2019^b; Tommasini, 2004). She was mainly known for singing Italian opera roles and studied music at the Arrigo Boito Conservatory, Parma, Italy, under the tutorage of soprano Carmen Melis (Augstyn et al., 2019^b; LeSueur, 2019^b; Rasponi, 1994). According to Augstyn et al. (2019^b), Melis secured Tebaldi's operatic debut in 1944 as Elena (*Mefistofele*), a spinto soprano role at the Teatro Municipal in Rovigo, Italy. She did not perform again until after World War II (1939–1945), as many opera houses were closed during this time. In the mid-twentieth century, Tebaldi became a popular spinto soprano, most frequently performing Puccini's *Tosca* (Repertory, 2009). The last role that she debuted was in 1970 as Minnie (*La Fanciulla del West*) at the Metropolitan Opera House (The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^j). Jones (2003) believes that Tebaldi's career ended prematurely when she ventured

into the dramatic soprano repertoire, as the vocal demands of the genre damaged her voice to the extent that she lost her upper range.

Table 4–1: Chronological order of the roles performed by Renata Tebaldi¹²

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i> ¹³
1944	22		Elena	<i>Mefistofele</i>	A. Boito	Spinto
		1949– ¹⁴ 50, ‘53, ‘55, ‘57–58, ‘64–67, ‘73	Desdemona	<i>Otello</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
		1955–61, ‘64–67, ‘69–70	Mimi	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric/spinto ¹⁵
1947	25	1948, ‘55–57, ‘59–60, ‘65–66, ‘70	Maddalena di Coigny	<i>Andrea Chénier</i>	U. Giordano	Spinto
1948	26		Marguerite	<i>La Damnation de Faust</i>	H. Berlioz	Lyric mezzo-soprano/spinto
1950	28	1951–52, ‘58, ‘72	Alice Ford	<i>Falstaff</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic coloratura/spinto
		1955, ‘57, ‘64	Aïda	<i>Aïda</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
			Countess Almaviva	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto/lyric
1951	29	1957	Violetta Valéry	<i>La Traviata</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic coloratura
1952	30	1965	Margherita	<i>Mefistofele</i>	A. Boito	Spinto

¹² References used to compile this table: Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^a); Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^b); Royal Opera House (n.d.^h); San Francisco Opera (n.d.^d); Teatro alla Scala (n.d.^e); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^j); and Tommasini (2004).

¹³ Unless otherwise stated, all *fach* entries are soprano categories.

¹⁴ Hyphen used to show that the singer sang the role every year between those two dates.

¹⁵ Both *fächer* are specified in *Handbuch der Oper* (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016). Therefore, both *fächer* are specified in the table and in the same order as they appear in the manual.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i> ¹³
		1957, '63, '68–69	Adriana Lecouvreur	<i>Adriana Lecouvreur</i>	F. Ciléa	Spinto
1953	31	1955–60, '64–66, '68–70	Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
			La Wally	<i>La Wally</i>	A. Catalani	Dramatic/spinto
1954	32		Tatiana	<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	P. I. Tchaikovsky	Spinto/lyric
1955	33	1956, '60	Leonora di Vargas	<i>La Forza del Destino</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
1956	34	1960–61, '64–65	Amelia Grimaldi	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
1957	35	1959–60, '67, '75	Manon Lescaut	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic coloratura/spinto
1958	36	1960–61, '68	Cio-Cio-San	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	G. Puccini	Spinto
1960	38		Princess Fedora Romanov	<i>Fedora</i>	U. Giordano	Not listed ¹⁶ (spinto/dramatic)
1966	44	1967, '82	La Gioconda	<i>La Gioconda</i>	A. Ponchielli	Spinto
1970	48		Minnie	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto

4.1.2 Gundula Janowitz

Gundula Janowitz was born 2 August 1937 in Berlin, Germany (Oron, 2001^a). Janowitz studied music at the Graz Conservatory, Austria. She won a singing competition at the conservatory which led to her opera debut in 1960 as Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Wiener Staatsoper (Feeney, 2019). In the same year, Janowitz debuted her first spinto soprano role, Erste Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*. This is the role, alongside Die Feldmarschallin (*Der Rosenkavalier*), which would

¹⁶ *Fedora* is not listed in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), however, it is listed in Boldrey (1994) as a spinto and light dramatic soprano role.

become her most frequently performed role (Feeney, 2019; Wiener Staatsoper Archives, n.d.^b). The last role Janowitz debuted was Clytemnestre (*Iphigénie en Tauride*) at the Wiener Staatsoper in 1987 (Wiener Staatsoper Archives, n.d.^b).

Table 4–2: Chronological order of the roles performed by Gundula Janowitz¹⁷

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1960	23	1961–62	Barbarina	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Soubrette
		1961–62,	Kate Pinkerton	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	G. Puccini	Soprano/ mezzo-soprano kl. P. ¹⁸
		1961, ‘63, ‘65–66	Lola	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>	P. Mascagni	Lyric mezzo-soprano
		1961–65	Flora Bervoix	<i>La Traviata</i>	G. Verdi	Lyric mezzo-soprano
		1961, ‘63, ‘66	Gerhilde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano m. P. ¹⁹
		1961–64, ‘67–68	Blumenmädchen	<i>Parsifal</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano kl. P.
			Erste Edelknabe	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano kl. P.

¹⁷ References used to compile this table: Bayreuth Festspiele (n.d.^b); Deutsche Oper Berlin (n.d.^d); Glyndebourne Opera Archives (n.d.^b); Opera Archives (n.d.^a); Royal Opera House (n.d.^d); Salzburg Festival Archive (n.d.^b); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^d); and Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^b).

¹⁸ kl. P. or ‘*kleiner Solopartie*’ (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016, p. xvii), indicates a role that only appears in a limited number of scenes and the *fach* allocation of this role is less strict.

¹⁹ Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) refer to a selection of roles as soprano m. P., or ‘*mittlere Solopartie*’ (p. xvii), meaning a solo part which features mostly as part of ensembles and is often vocally less demanding. The *fach* assignment of this role is less strict.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
		1962–63, '65	Woglinde	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Lyric ²⁰
		1962–66, '68–70, '84–86	Erste Dame	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto
1961	24	1962–66, '70–71, '73.	Pamina	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric
			Dido	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	H. Purcell	Lyric mezzo-soprano/lyric
		1962–65	Voce del cielo	<i>Don Carlos</i>	G. Verdi	Lyric
		1962–65	One of the Fünf Mägde ²¹	<i>Elektra</i>	R. Strauss	Soprano kl. P
		1962–63, '66	Mimi	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric/spinto
1962	25	1963	Echo	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	R. Strauss	Lyric/spinto
			Countess Ceprano	<i>Rigoletto</i>	G. Verdi	Soprano kl. P.
			Woglinde	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Lyric
		1963–64	Helena	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	B. Britten	Lyric
1963	26	1964–65	Drusilla	<i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i>	C. G. A. Monteverdi	Lyric
		1964–65	Pallas Athene	<i>L'incoronazione di Poppea</i>	C. G. A. Monteverdi	Mezzo-soprano kl. P.
		1964–65	Marzelline	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Soubrette/lyric
		1964–65	Ein junger Hirt	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Lyric/soubrette
1964	27		Ilia	<i>Idomeneo</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric coloratura/lyric

²⁰ Some roles in Wagner operas were not written for the quintessential Wagnerian voices. When this is the case the relevant *fach* according to Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) is stated.

²¹ Although the Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^b) do not state which of the Fünf Mägde Janowitz sang, in the cast list she is listed fourth, which could possibly indicate that she sang Vierte Magd.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
		1965–67, '70, '72	Micaëla	<i>Carmen</i>	G. Bizet	Lyric/spinto
			Die Kaiserin	<i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
		1965–66	Cherubino	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric mezzo-soprano
		1965–66, '68–69	Ighino	<i>Palestrina</i>	H. Pfitzner	Lyric
1965	28	1966–68, '70–71	Mařenka	<i>Prodaná nevěsta</i>	B. Smetana	Lyric
1966	29	1968–71, '87	Gutrune	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1972–73, '75, '77, '87	Agathe	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	C. M. von Weber	Spinto/lyric
1967	30	1985–88	Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1968, '72	Elisabeth	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1968–72, '75–76, '78–79, '81–82	Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
		1969, '75–76, '79	Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/lyric
1968	31	1969–70, '73–76, '79, '82	Fiordiligi	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
		1981–82	Freia	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1969–73, '78–90	Countess Almaviva	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto/lyric
1969	32	1970–71	Amelia Grimaldi	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
1970	33		Élisabeth de Valois	<i>Don Carlos</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
1971	34	1973, '76–85, '87–91	Ariadne	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
1976	39	1977–78, '80	Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
		1977–83	Arabella	<i>Arabella</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1977	40	1978–79, '81–85	Die Gräfin	<i>Capriccio</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
1978	41	1979–82, '84–90	Die Feldmarschallin	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto
1983	46		Ada	<i>Die Feen</i>	R. Wagner	Not listed ²² (Light dramatic)
1984	47	1985	Isabella	<i>Karl V.</i>	E. Krenek	Not listed ²³
1985	48	1987	Donna Elvira	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric
1987	50	1989	Clytemnestre	<i>Iphigénie en Aulide</i>	C. W. Gluck	Dramatic mezzo-soprano

4.1.3 Karita Mattila

Karita Mattila was born 5 September 1960 in Somero, Finland, and is still performing to this day (Hermann, 2004). She studied music at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and made her opera debut in 1983 as Countess Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at the Finnish National Opera (Hermann, 2004; Ooppera Baletti, n.d.). During the same year, she was the first singer to win Cardiff Singer of the World (Matheopoulos, 1998), now one of the best-known and most prestigious competitions for opera and concert singers (BBC, 2020). Mattila is well known as a spinto soprano, frequently performing the roles of Elsa von Brabant (*Lohengrin*) and Janáček's Kát'a Kabanová, even though she has recently sung several dramatic soprano roles, such as Kostelnička in *Jenůfa* (Royal Opera House, n.d.^c; The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^g). Her most recent role debuts came in 2020,

²² Ada is not listed in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), however, Boldrey (1994) lists the role in the light dramatic soprano *fach*.

²³ Isabella (*Karl V.*) is not included in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

as Despina in the Finnish National Opera’s *Così fan tutte*, a twist on *Così fan tutte*, and as Cizi Knezna (*Rusalka*) at the Teatro Real (Ooppera Baletti, n.d.; Teatro Real, 2020).

Table 4–3: Chronological order of the roles performed by Karita Mattila²⁴

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1983	23	1984, ‘87	Countess Almaviva	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto/lyric
1986	26		Fiordiligi	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
		1989, ‘91	Pamina	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric
1987	27	1990	Donna Elvira	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric
		1999	Amelia Grimaldi	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
1989	29		Ilia	<i>Idomeneo</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric coloratura/lyric
			Agathe	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	C. M. von Weber	Spinto/lyric
1993	33	1996	Musetta	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric coloratura/soubrette
		2004	Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
		1995, 2001	Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/lyric
1995	35	2001	Liza	<i>Pique Dame</i>	P. I. Tchaikovsky	Spinto
1996	36	1998	Élisabeth de Valois	<i>Don Carlos</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto

²⁴ References used to compile this table: Bayerische Staatsoper (2020); Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^e); Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^d); Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^c); Ooppera Baletti (n.d.); Royal Opera House (n.d.^e); San Francisco Opera (n.d.^b); and The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^f).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
		1997–98, 2006	Elsa von Brabant	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
1997	37	2002	Chrysothemis	<i>Elektra</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto
2000	40	2001, '05–07	Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
2001	41	2003, '07, '13–14	Jenůfa	<i>Jenůfa</i>	L. Janáček	Spinto
2002	42	2003–05, '09	Káťa Kabanová	<i>Káťa Kabanová</i>	L. Janáček	Spinto
2004	44		Arabella	<i>Arabella</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto
			Salome	<i>Salome</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
2005	45		Amelia Anckarström	<i>Un ballo in Maschera</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic
		2006, '08	Manon Lescaut	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic coloratura/spinto
2006	46	2009–10	Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
2009	49		Tatiana	<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	P. I. Tchaikovsky	Spinto/lyric
2010	50	2012	Emilia Marty	<i>Věc Makropulos</i>	L. Janáček	Dramatic
2015	55	2016–18	Kostelnička	<i>Jenůfa</i>	L. Janáček	Dramatic
2017	57		Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
			Ariadne	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
			Kundry	<i>Parsifal</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic* ²⁵ /dramatic mezzo-soprano

²⁵ Although Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) refer to the Wagnerian roles as dramatic, he emphasizes “the enormous dimensions and the heavily staffed orchestra of the musical dramas demanded a considerable increase in the singers' physical performances (voice power and volume)” (p. 925). These roles are indicated with an asterisk.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
2018	58		Plotina	<i>Hadrian</i>	R. Wainwright	Not listed ²⁶
2019	59		Ortrud	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*/ dramatic mezzo- soprano
			Madame de Croissy	<i>Dialogues des Carmélites</i>	F. Poulenc	Dramatic alto/ dramatic mezzo- soprano
2020	60		Despina	<i>Covid fan tutte</i>	W.A. Mozart ²⁷	Soubrette
			Cizi Knezna	<i>Rusalka</i>	A. Dvořák	Dramatic/ dramatic mezzo- soprano

4.2 Career trajectories of the selected dramatic sopranos

4.2.1 Eva Turner

Eva Turner was born 10 March 1892 in Oldham, England and died 6 June 1990 in London, England (Raponi, 1994). Researching the career trajectory of Turner was different from the research of the other singers because the online archives of opera companies do not date back as far as her career. For example, in an interview with Rasponi, Turner speaks about her frequent performances at the Royal Opera House, however, the online archive only has a record of two performances as Puccini's *Turandot* in 1947 (Rasponi; 1994; Royal Opera House, n.d.^b).

²⁶ Role not included in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

²⁷ The libretto, written to Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, was scripted by Minna Lindgren. The storyline was adapted to depict Finnish life during the COVID-19 pandemic (Finnish National Opera and Ballet, n.d.).

Turner was a dramatic soprano who began her opera career in the Carl Rosa Opera chorus in London (Brook, 1958; Rasponi, 1994). She sang her first role with the company in 1916 as the Shepherd in *Tannhäuser* (Eriksson, n.d.). Turner first ventured into the dramatic soprano *fach* in 1920, when she sang Santuzza (*Cavalleria Rusticana*) at the Carl Rosa Opera House. She became a well-known dramatic soprano, frequently performing Leonora throughout her career, along with Puccini’s Turandot and Verdi’s Aïda (Brook, 1958; Eriksson, n.d.; Rideout, 2008). The final role that Turner debuted was Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*) with the London and Provincial Opera Society touring Scotland. She repeated the role at the Royal Opera House in 1937 and 1938 (Internet Archive, 2008; Rasponi, 1994).

Table 4–4: Chronological order of the roles performed by Eva Turner²⁸

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1916	24		Shepherd	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Lyric
Between 1916–20 ²⁹	24–28		Kate Pinkerton	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	G. Puccini	Soprano/ mezzo-soprano kl. P.
		Unknown	Micaëla	<i>Carmen</i>	G. Bizet	Lyric/ spinto
		1918, ‘20–21	Musetta	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric coloratura/ soubrette
1920	28	1921, ‘25, ‘28	Santuzza	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>	P. Mascagni	Dramatic/ dramatic

²⁸ References used to compile this table: Eriksson (n.d.); Internet Archive (2008); Rasponi (1994); and Royal Opera House (n.d.^b).

²⁹ Archiving of performance information was not as common in the early 1900’s as it is today. In an interview with Rasponi (1994), Turner spoke about the first roles she sang once she stepped out the choir, naming the Shepherd (*Tannhäuser*), Kate Pinkerton (*Madama Butterfly*), Micaëla (*Carmen*) and Musetta (*La Bohème*). According to her, the next role she debuted was Santuzza (*Cavalleria Rusticana*) in 1920 at the Royal Opera House. Since Eriksson (n.d.) states that Turner debuted as the Shepherd in 1916, it can be deduced that she sang the roles of Kate Pinkerton, Micaëla and Musetta between 1916 and 1920.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
						mezzo-soprano
		1921, '25, '28, '30, '35	Leonora	<i>Il Trovatore</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic coloratura
		Unknown	Venus	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*/dramatic mezzo-soprano
		1921	Antonia	<i>Les Contes d'Hoffmann</i>	J. Offenbach	Spinto/lyric
		1921–22, '24	Cio-Cio-San	<i>Madama Butterfly</i>	G. Puccini	Spinto
1921	29	1929	Elisabeth	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1924	Freia	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1930	Elsa von Brabant	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1935–36	Brünnhilde	<i>Siegfried</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
		1928–30	Brünnhilde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
		1925–31, '33, '37–39, '48	Aïda	<i>Aida</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
1921–1922 season	29/30	Unknown	Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/lyric
		Unknown	Thais	<i>Thais and Talmaae</i>	C. M. Campbell	Not listed ³⁰
		1925	Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
1924	32	1927, '30	Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
		1929, '32, '34–35, '38	Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto

³⁰ Role not included in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1925	33	Unknown	La Gioconda	<i>La Gioconda</i>	A. Ponchielli	Spinto
1926	34	1927–31, ‘35, ‘37–39, ‘47	Turandot	<i>Turandot</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic
		1929	Minnie	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
1930	38	1931	Isabeau	<i>Isabeau</i>	P. Mascagni	Not listed ³¹ (Dramatic)
1934	42	Unknown	La Wally	<i>La Wally</i>	A. Catalani	Dramatic/spinto
1935	43	1937	Amelia Anckarström	<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic
1936	44	1937–38	Isolde	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*

4.2.2 Ghena Dimitrova

Ghena Dimitrova was born 6 May 1941 in Sofia, Bulgaria and died 11 June 2005 in Milan, Italy (Obituaries: Ghena Dimitrova, 2005). She began her operatic career with Sofia Opera, also known as the Bulgarian National Opera and Ballet, as a mezzo-soprano, singing the role of Mercédès in Bizet’s *Carmen* (Obituaries: Ghena Dimitrova, 2005; Opera-arias.com, 2011). The date of Dimitrova’s operatic debut is unknown. According to Obituaries: Ghena Dimitrova (2005), she sang Mercédès, Emma (*Khovanshchina*) and Erste Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*), before making her breakthrough performance as Abigaille (Nabucco) in 1967 (Opera-aria.com, 2011). Throughout her career she became renowned as a dramatic soprano, most frequently performing Puccini’s *Turandot* (The Telegraph, 2005). In The Telegraph (2005) it is stated that she sang Verdi’s *Aïda* often; however, it is unknown when she debuted *Aïda*, as The Telegraph (2005) states that she debuted the role sometime between 1974 and 1978 but no exact date is provided. Similarly, she also debuted Leonora (*Il Trovatore*), Minnie (*La Fanciulla del West*), Lady Macbeth (*Macbeth*),

³¹ Although Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) do not list Mascagni’s *Isabeau* in their manual, the role is listed under the dramatic soprano *fach* in Boldrey (1994).

Desdemona (*Otello*) and Puccini’s Manon Lescaut during the same period (The Telegraph, 2005). Her final role debut was in 1990, when she sang Maddalena di Coigny (*Andrea Chénier*) at the Wiener Staatsoper (Wiener Staatsoper Archives, n.d.^a). It is important to note that Dimitrova only sang roles in the Italian repertoire, which excluded the possibility, if there ever was one, to sing Wagnerian roles. It was only at the start of her career that she sang three non-Italian roles.

Table 4–5: Chronological order of the roles performed by Ghena Dimitrova³²

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
Pre-1967	<26	Unknown	Mercédès	<i>Carmen</i>	G. Bizet	Lyric mezzo-soprano
			Emma	<i>Khovanshchina</i>	M. Mussorgsky	Spinto
			Erste Dame	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto
1967	26	1981, ‘86, ‘88	Abigaille	<i>Nabucco</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic coloratura/dramatic
1971	30	1972	Leonora di Vargas	<i>La Forza del Destino</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
1972	31	1973	Amelia Anckarström	<i>Un Ballo in Maschera</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic
Between 1974–78	33–37	1980–82, ‘85	Aïda	<i>Aïda</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
		1983, ‘85–86	Leonora	<i>Il Trovatore</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic coloratura
		1993	Minnie	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
		1982–83, ‘85, ‘88	Lady Macbeth	<i>Macbeth</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/dramatic mezzo-soprano
		Unknown	Desdemona	<i>Otello</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto

³² References used to compile this table: Blyth (2005); C. Walker (personal communications, January 6, 2021); Lyric Opera of Chicago (2020^e); Obituaries: Ghena Dimitrova (2005); Royal Opera House (n.d.^e); San Francisco Opera (n.d.^a); Teatro alla Scala (n.d.^b); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^c); The Telegraph (2005); and Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^a).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
		Unknown	Manon Lescaut	<i>Manon Lescaut</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic coloratura/spinto
1975	34	1980–85, '87–90, '92, '95–96	Turandot	<i>Turandot</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic
1978	37	1979, '82, '85, '88–90, '92, '94	Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
		1988–89, '97	Santuzza	<i>Cavalleria Rusticana</i>	P. Mascagni	Dramatic/dramatic mezzo-soprano
1980	46	1985, '87, '90	La Gioconda	<i>La Gioconda</i>	A. Ponchielli	Spinto
1981	40		Elvira	<i>Ernani</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic coloratura
1984	43		Giselda	<i>I Lombardi</i>	G. Verdi	Not listed ³³ (Dramatic coloratura/spinto)
1985	44	1994	Amneris	<i>Aïda</i>	G. Verdi	Mezzo-soprano
1990	49		Maddalena di Coigny	<i>Andrea Chénier</i>	U. Giordano	Spinto

4.2.3 Lise Davidsen

Lise Davidsen was born 8 February 1987 in Stokke, Norway, and recently became a highly sought-after dramatic soprano (Manheim, n.d.). Davidsen made her opera debut at the Royal Danish Opera (where she was a student in the young artist programme) during the 2012–2013 season as Lapák and Sowa in *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Intermusica, n.d.). In 2014, she graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Music (Davidsen, n.d.^a). Although a relatively new singer on the opera scene, Davidsen rose to international fame in 2015 when she won both Queen Sonja and Operalia singing competitions (Classic FM, n.d.). Since then, she has sung in numerous prestigious opera houses

³³ Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) do not include Giselda (*I Lombardi*) in their manual. Boldrey (1994) lists this role in the dramatic coloratura and spinto soprano *fächer*.

and is one of the most in demand dramatic sopranos active today. Notwithstanding her young age and her relatively short career, she is a worthy inclusion in this study, as her career bloomed so fast, and the inherent size and beauty of her voice quickly caught the attention of the opera world (Barone, 2019). In the past few years, Davidsen has started to sing Wagnerian repertoire. However, apart from one appearance as Dritte Norne (*Die Götterdämmerung*), she has been limiting herself to the lighter Wagnerian roles, which are well suited to spinto sopranos. She is scheduled to sing Elisabeth (*Tannhäuser*) and Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) in 2021, Wagnerian roles also well suited to spinto sopranos (Davidsen, n.d.^b). The research question “In which *fach* did this select group of sopranos sing during the later stages of their careers?” will, in her case, be answered based on her current roles and future engagements.

Table 4–6: Chronological order of the roles performed by Lise Davidsen³⁴

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i>
2012	25		Lapák	<i>The Cunning Little Vixen</i>	L. Janáček	Mezzo-soprano kl. P.
			Sowa	<i>The Cunning Little Vixen</i>	L. Janáček	Alto kl. P
2015	28	2018	Ortlinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano m. P.
2017	30	2021 ³⁵	Ariadne	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
			Médée	<i>Médée</i>	L. Cherubini	Dramatic
2018	31		Dritte Norne	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
			Freia	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto

³⁴ References used to compile this table: Bayerische Staatsoper (2021); Bayreuth Festspiele (n.d.^e); BBC (2021); Davidsen (n.d.^a); Davidsen (n.d.^b); Deutsche Oper Berlin. (n.d.^e); Deutsche Oper Berlin. (n.d.^f); Glyndebourne Opera Archives (n.d.^c); Intermusica (n.d.); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^h); and Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^d).

³⁵ The performance, scheduled for March 10, 2021, did not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however, it is included in the table because if it were not for the pandemic, the performance would have taken place (Davidsen, n.d.^b).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
2019	32		Liza	<i>Pique Dame</i>	P. I. Tchaikovsky	Spinto
		2020–21 ^{o36}	Elisabeth	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
2020	33		Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
			Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
			Jenůfa	<i>Jenůfa</i>	L. Janáček	Spinto
			Amelia Anckarström	<i>Un ballo in Maschera</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic
2021 ^o	34		Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/lyric

4.3 Career trajectories of the selected Wagnerian sopranos

4.3.1 Kirsten Flagstad

Kirsten Flagstad was born 12 July 1895 in Hamar, Norway, and died 7 December 1962 in Oslo, Norway (Burak, 2009). She began to learn the role of Elsa von Brabant (*Lohengrin*) at the age of ten (Augstyn, et al., 2019^a; Steane, 1996). Warned by her singing teacher that this would be detrimental to her voice, Flagstad began to sing roles from lighter soprano *fächer* until she was older (Augstyn, et al., 2019^a; Knapper, n.d.; Oron, 2001^b; Steane, 1996). She made her opera debut at the Nationaltheatret, Oslo, as the young girl Nuri in *Tiefland* (Kirsten Flagstad Museum, n.d.^b). Following the birth of her daughter Else-Marie in 1920, Flagstad's voice had grown significantly in size, which led to her spinto/dramatic soprano debut as Amelia Anckarström (*Un ballo in Maschera*) and dramatic/spinto debut as Minnie (*La Fanciulla del West*) in 1921 (Kirsten Flagstad Museum, n.d.^a; Kirsten Flagstad Museum, n.d.^b). For the first half of Flagstad's career, she did not sing any Wagnerian roles. In 1929, Flagstad sang her first 'spinto' Wagnerian role as Elsa von Brabant (*Lohengrin*), before progressing to heavier Wagnerian roles in 1932 as Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*). She became intentionally renowned for her portrayal of Wagnerian roles, especially as

³⁶ ^o indicates that the performance scheduled for 2021 has not yet occurred.

Brünnhilde (*Die Götterdämmerung*, *Siegfried* and *Die Walküre*), frequently performing each role (Kirsten Flagstad Museum, n.d.^b; The Metropolitan Opera Archives, n.d.^g). Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*) was the final new role that she took on at the Mermaid Theatre, London, in 1951 (Kirsten Flagstad Museum, n.d.^b).

Table 4–7: Chronological order of the roles performed by Kirsten Flagstad³⁷

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1913	18	1914	Nuri	<i>Tiefland</i>	E. d'Albert	Soprano m. P.
1914	19		Germaine	<i>Les cloches de Corneville</i>	R. Planquette	Not listed ³⁸
1919	24		Martha	<i>Der Evangelimann</i>	W. Kienzl	Not listed ³⁹
1921	26		Erste Dame	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto
		1929	Desdemona	<i>Otello</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
			Amelia Anckarström	<i>Un ballo in Maschera</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto/dramatic
			Minnie	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
		Shepherd boy	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Boy's voice/Mezzo-soprano kl. P.	

³⁷ References used to compile this table: Kirsten Flagstad Museum (n.d.^b); Royal Opera House (n.d.^f); San Francisco Opera (n.d.^c); Teatro alla Scala (n.d.^e); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^g); and Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^c).

³⁸ Germaine is not listed in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

³⁹ Neither Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) nor Aria-database.com (n.d.) state the *fach* allocation of Martha.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1922	27		Diane	<i>Orphée aux Enfers</i>	J. Offenbach	Not listed ⁴⁰
			Eurydice	<i>Orphée aux Enfers</i>	J. Offenbach	Not listed ⁴¹ (Light and full lyric)
1923	28		Countess Francesca	<i>Wenn Liebe erwacht</i>	E. Künneke	Not listed ⁴²
1924	29	1925	Micaëla	<i>Carmen</i>	G. Bizet	Lyric/ spinto
1926	31	1927, '32	Marguerite	<i>Faust</i>	C.-F. Gounod	Dramatic coloratura/ spinto
1927	32	1934, '36–39, '41–42, '49–51	Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
			Euridice	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	C. W. Gluck	Lyric/ spinto
1928	33		Agathe	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	C. M. von Weber	Spinto/ lyric
1929	34	1931	Aïda	<i>Aïda</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/ spinto
			Mimi	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric/ spinto
			Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/ spinto
		1935–41	Elsa von Brabant	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
			Magda de Civry	<i>La Rondine</i>	G. Puccini	Spinto
1930	35	1933	Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/ lyric

⁴⁰ Diane is not included in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

⁴¹ Although Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) do not discuss Eurydice in their manual, it is listed in Boldrey (1994) as a light and full lyric soprano role.

⁴² Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) and Aria-database.com (n.d.) do not provide the *fach* allocation of Countess Francesca.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1932	37	1935–41, '43, '47–51	Isolde	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
1933	38		Ortlinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano
			Dritte Norne	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
1934	39	1935, '37–39, '41, '51	Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
			Gutrune	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1935–41	Elisabeth	<i>Tannhäuser</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
1935	40	1936–41, '43, '48–51	Brünnhilde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
		1936–41, '47–51	Brünnhilde	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
		1936–41, '50–51	Kundry	<i>Parsifal</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic* /dramatic mezzo-soprano
		1936–41, '49–51	Brünnhilde	<i>Siegfried</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
1937	42	1939–40	Senta	<i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic* /spinto
1942	47		Reiza	<i>Oberon</i>	C. M. von Weber	Dramatic/ dramatic coloratura
1943	48	1952	Alceste	<i>Alceste</i>	C. W. Gluck	Dramatic/ dramatic mezzo-soprano
1951	56	1952–53	Dido	<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	H. Purcell	Lyric mezzo-soprano/ lyric

4.3.2 Elisabeth Grümmer

Elisabeth Grümmer (born Elisabeth Schilz) was born 31 March 1911 in Yutz, France and died 6 November 1986 in Warendorf, Germany. She did not study music at university, but rather drama (IMDb.com, 2018; Stevenson, n.d.). Before performing in operas, she first performed as an actress, onstage and in films (Stevenson, n.d.). She made her opera debut in 1940 as Blumenmädchen (*Parsifal*) at the Theater Aachen (Stevenson, n.d.). Throughout her life, she sang across *fächer*, particularly in the lyric soprano, spinto soprano and the Wagnerian soprano *fächer*, but avoided many dramatic soprano roles. She was well-known for her portrayal of Wagnerian roles, especially Ortud (*Lohengrin*), as it highlighted the warmth, weight and colour of her voice (Rasponi, 1994). However, none of the online archives specify when any of her Ortud performances took place. The roles composed by Wagner that were found include Elsa von Brabant (*Lohengrin*), Eva (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*), Freia (*Das Rheingold*) and Gutrune (*Die Götterdämmerung*), all of which are well suited to spinto sopranos. Her final role debut was in 1967 as Die Feldmarschallin (*Der Rosenkavalier*).

Table 4–8: Chronological order of the roles performed by Elisabeth Grümmer⁴³

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i>
1940	29	Unknown	Blumenmädchen	<i>Parsifal</i>	R. Wagner	Soprano kl. P.
1941	29+	Consistently throughout career ⁴⁴	Octavian	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic mezzo-soprano/ lyric

⁴³ References used to compile this table: Bayreuth Festspiele (n.d.^a); Deutsche Oper Berlin (n.d.^a); Deutsche Oper Berlin (n.d.^c); Glyndebourne Opera Archives (n.d.^a); Rasponi (1994); Royal Opera House (n.d.^a); Salzburg Festival Archive (n.d.^a); Stevenson (n.d.); Teatro alla Scala (n.d.^a); and The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.^b).

⁴⁴ There are no specific dates as to when Grümmer repeated the role of Octavian. However, according to Rasponi (1994), she repeated the role consistently throughout her career. The other roles that she sang consistently throughout her career are similarly listed, but where specific dates are available, they are stated.

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
						mezzo-soprano
		Unknown	Alice Ford	<i>Falstaff</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic coloratura/spinto
1947	36	1949, '58	Micaëla	<i>Carmen</i>	G. Bizet	Lyric/spinto
			Ellen Orford	<i>Peter Grimes</i>	B. Britten	Dramatic/spinto
1947-1950	36-39	Consistently throughout career	Countess Almaviva	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Spinto/lyric
		Consistently throughout career	Elsa von Brabant	<i>Lohengrin</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1951–52, '57–61	Eva	<i>Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto/lyric
		Consistently throughout career, 1955–56	Pamina	<i>Die Zauberflöte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric
		Consistently throughout career	Fiordiligi	<i>Così fan tutte</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
		Consistently throughout career, 1956	Ilia	<i>Idomeneo</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric coloratura/lyric
1953	42	1954, '56	Donna Anna	<i>Don Giovanni</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic coloratura
1954	43		Agathe	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	C. M. von Weber	Spinto/lyric
1957	46	1958	Freia	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
		1958	Gutrune	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
1961	50	1962	Elettra	<i>Idomeneo</i>	W. A. Mozart	Dramatic
1967	56	Unknown	Die Feldmarschallin	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto

4.3.3 Nina Stemme

Nina Stemme (born Nina Thöldte) was born 11 May 1963 in Stockholm, Sweden. She made her opera debut in 1989 in Cortona, Italy, in the mezzo-soprano role Cherubino in *Le nozze di Figaro* (Sanderson, n.d.; Stemme, n.d.^a). Stemme then went on to study at the National College of Opera, Stockholm, and following her graduation returned to the professional stage. During her studies she prepared her voice for the transition to heavier *fächer*, singing her first spinto soprano role, that of Freia, in 1994 (*Das Rheingold*) at the Bayreuth Festival (Bayreuth Festspiele, n.d.^d). Since then, she has increasingly sung Wagnerian roles, including Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*) and Brünnhilde (*Siegfried* and *Die Walküre*). In 2019, Stemme made her most recent role debut as Die Färberin in *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Wiener Staatsoper (Stemme, n.d.^a; Wiener Staatsoper Archives, n.d.^e). Stemme (n.d.^b) currently shows no upcoming performances due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, Deutsche Oper Berlin (n.d.^b) states that she is scheduled to sing Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre*) in 2022.

Table 4–9: Chronological order of the roles performed by Nina Stemme⁴⁵

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
1989	26	Unknown	Cherubino	<i>Le nozze di Figaro</i>	W. A. Mozart	Lyric mezzo-soprano
1994	31	1995, '97	Freia	<i>Das Rheingold</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
1994-2003	31-40	Unknown	Mimi	<i>La Bohème</i>	G. Puccini	Lyric/spinto
		Unknown	Euridice	<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	C. W. Gluck	Lyric/spinto
		Unknown	Agathe	<i>Der Freischütz</i>	C. M. von Weber	Spinto/lyric
2000	37	2003–04, '07–08, '10	Senta	<i>Der Fliegende Holländer</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*/spinto

⁴⁵ References used to compile this table: Bayreuth Festspiele (n.d.^d); Glyndebourne Opera Archives (n.d.^d); Royal Opera House (n.d.^e); Salzburg Festival Archive (n.d.^e); Sanderson (n.d.); Stemme (n.d.^a); Teatro alla Scala (n.d.^d); The Metropolitan Opera Archives (n.d.ⁱ); and Wiener Staatsoper Archives (n.d.^e).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	Fach
2002	39		Nyssia	<i>Der König Kandaules</i>	A. von Zemlinsky	Not listed ⁴⁶
2003	40	2005–07, ‘09, ‘13, ‘16	Isolde	<i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
2004	41	2007, ‘09–10	Sieglinde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Spinto
2005	42		Amelia Grimaldi	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i>	G. Verdi	Spinto
2008	45	2009	Leonora di Vargas	<i>La Forza del Destino</i>	G. Verdi	Dramatic/spinto
		2009–10, ‘12–14	Brünnhilde	<i>Siegfried</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
2010	47	2011	Ariadne	<i>Ariadne auf Naxos</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic/spinto
		2011, ‘13–14, ‘16, 22°	Brünnhilde	<i>Die Walküre</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
2011	48	2015	Leonora	<i>Fidelio</i>	L. van Beethoven	Dramatic
2012	49	2019	Floria Tosca	<i>Tosca</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
			Die Feldmarschallin	<i>Der Rosenkavalier</i>	R. Strauss	Spinto
2013	50	2014	Brünnhilde	<i>Die Götterdämmerung</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*
		2014	Minnie	<i>La Fanciulla del West</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic/spinto
2015	52	2016	Turandot	<i>Turandot</i>	G. Puccini	Dramatic
		2016–17	Elektra	<i>Elektra</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic
2017	54		Kundry	<i>Parsifal</i>	R. Wagner	Dramatic*/dramatic mezzo-soprano
			Katerina Lvovna Izmailova	<i>Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District</i>	D. Shostakovich	Not listed ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The *fach* allocation of Nyssia is not stated in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

⁴⁷ Katerina not included in Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016), Boldrey (1994), DeWood (n.d.), Cotton (2007), Cotton (2012), McGinnis (2010) or Aria-database.com (n.d.).

Year role debuted	Age	Year(s) role repeated	Role	Opera	Composer	<i>Fach</i>
2019	56		Die Färberin	<i>Die Frau ohne Schatten</i>	R. Strauss	Dramatic

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter includes the career trajectories of Renata Tebaldi, Gundula Janowitz, Karita Mattila, Eva Turner, Ghena Dimitrova, Lise Davidsen, Kirsten Flagstad, Elisabeth Grümmer and Nina Stemme. The sopranos were discussed chronologically according to the *fach* they are internationally renowned for. A brief biography of each of the singers was provided, followed by a table presenting the collected data. Only the roles sung in the most prestigious opera houses were included in the table, stating the *fach* allocation of each as listed in the manual by Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016). The tables allow for the identification of any potential patterns that might emerge from the data.

Chapter 5 – Summary and conclusion

This chapter contains a summary of the study and the conclusion that was reached after collection and analysis of the data. The research questions are answered, followed by recommendations for further study.

5.1 Summary

The inspiration behind this study was my observation of young singers whose voices display inherent dramatic vocal characteristics, but who, in my opinion, sing repertoire which is inappropriate for their current stages of vocal development; more specifically, repertoire which is still too heavy and demanding for the voice at the time. This led to the decision to investigate the career trajectories of a select group of renowned opera singers who established themselves in the three heaviest soprano *fächer*, namely spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos. The focus of this study was to determine whether these sopranos sang the heavy repertoire they are known for since the early days of their careers, or if they started out singing roles from lighter *fächer*.

Repertoire selection criteria for young sopranos is not an exact science. Not only does the physiology of singers differ, including the structure of the vocal folds, but each singer develops at a different tempo – lighter voices generally faster than heavier voices (Miller, 2000). Regardless of the size of a voice, reputable pedagogues regularly warn against singing heavy repertoire too early, as doing so can cause permanent vocal damage (Edwards, n.d.; Ware, 1998). Choosing appropriate repertoire is essential for the healthy vocal development of singers (Jung, 2010), and voice classification aids singers in finding suitable repertoire for their voices (Hoch & Lister, 2016).

The German *fach* system is the most commonly relied upon voice classification system and was therefore used for this study. It categorises opera roles into specific voice types, known as *fächer*, based on the vocal demands inherent in the score (DeWood, n.d.). Seven soprano *fächer* are listed, namely soubrette, lyric coloratura soprano, lyric soprano, spinto soprano, dramatic coloratura

soprano, dramatic soprano, and Wagnerian soprano (Kloiber, Konold & Maschka, 2016; Malone, 2011; Miller, 2000). Voice classification can be regarded as a safety net for singers, as they are not usually expected to perform roles outside of their *fach* allocation, particularly in the German opera houses. This reduces the risk of singing roles beyond their vocal abilities (Miller, 1996).

Fach is mainly determined by the genetic physiology of a singer's vocal mechanism (Miller, 2000). Components influenced by this genetic makeup include the size of the larynx, consistency of mucus, the size and shape of the resonators, and physical build, including the height and lung capacity of a singer (Bickel, 2008; Chagnon, 1998; McGinnis, 2010). Other components to *fach* determination include range, tessitura, timbre and location of the *passaggi* (McGinnis, 2010). Since these elements are influenced by vocal technique (Bickel, 2008), it is essential that the voice be free of tension and that all registers should be accessible before classification is attempted. Poor technique can mask the inherent vocal qualities, which can lead to misclassification of the voice (Cotton, 2007). Until a young singer has a mastery of vocal technique, *fach* assignment should be avoided to reduce the risk of misclassification (Miller, 1996).

As the purpose of the study was to learn as much as possible about the career trajectories of nine successful, well-known sopranos⁴⁸, a qualitative research approach was appropriate. The guiding principles of a qualitative content analysis research design were followed, reducing the amount of data presented by only focusing on the information relating to the research questions. Information about the roles each singer sang during her career, mainly at the most prestigious opera houses globally, was gathered from a variety of sources⁴⁹ and moulded into data. The data was then organised chronologically into tables, enabling emerging patterns to be identified. The conclusions reached through the analysis of this data are discussed forthwith.

⁴⁸ The sopranos were pre-selected based on the criterion that they are international renowned for being either a spinto, dramatic or Wagnerian soprano.

⁴⁹ The most valuable source was the online databases of opera houses.

5.2 Conclusion

In this conclusion, the research questions that guided the study are answered. First, the secondary questions are discussed, after which the main research question is answered. The same order is followed throughout, a discussion of the spinto sopranos precedes, considering any similarities and differences found in the data, followed by a discussion on the dramatic and then Wagnerian sopranos. All the sopranos are then discussed together, including any similarities or differences identified amongst the different *fächer*.

5.2.1 In which *fach* did the select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos sing during the early stages of their careers?

The analysis revealed that, during the early years of their careers, all the spinto sopranos sang roles from light soprano *fächer* as well as the spinto roles they eventually became renowned for. Some of these spinto roles, such as Mimì (*La Bohème*) and Countess Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), are also listed by Kloiber, Konold and Maschka (2016) in the lyric soprano *fach*. Of the three spinto sopranos, Janowitz was the only one who sang not only a soubrette, but also a mezzo-soprano role during the early stage of her career, whereas Mattila ventured into dramatic coloratura territory by singing Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*).

The dramatic sopranos all sang roles from light mezzo-soprano and soprano *fächer*, as well as spinto soprano roles during the early years of their careers. Davidsen's relatively short career to date shows a different and somewhat unusual pattern. As soon as she attracted international attention in major singing competitions, she was cast in heavier roles, particularly in the spinto *fach*. Dimitrova and Turner, on the other hand, gradually transitioned from lighter to heavier *fächer*. Amongst this group of dramatic sopranos, Dimitrova and Davidsen were the only singers to include a dramatic soprano role during the early stages of their careers.

From the data presented in chapter 4, it is evident that none of the Wagnerian sopranos sang Wagnerian roles during the early years of their careers; however, they did include roles from the spinto soprano *fach*. Additionally, all of them sang roles from lighter soprano *fächer*, as well as

dipping their toes in the mezzo-soprano domain. Following her debut as the young Nuri (*Tiefland*), Flagstad went on to sing spinto and spinto/dramatic soprano roles. Grümmer also included a dramatic coloratura/spinto soprano role during the early years of her career. Like Flagstad and Grümmer, Stemme sang spinto soprano roles, but unlike the other two, most roles Stemme sang are listed as spinto/lyric soprano roles rather than spinto/dramatic soprano roles. This makes her the only Wagnerian soprano not to include a dramatic soprano role during the early years of her career.

When comparing the early careers of the nine sopranos in the study, it is clear that all of them, apart from Davidsen, included in their repertoire roles from the lighter side of the soprano *fach* spectrum, as well as spinto roles. The spinto soprano role Erste Dame (*Die Zauberflöte*) stands out as a role which several of the singers included in their repertoire list during the early years of their careers. Tebaldi, Janowitz, Mattila, Davidsen and Dimitrova were the only singers who performed their calling card role from the onset. This indicates that the heavier a voice, the less likely it is that a soprano would sing the same roles early and later in her career. Furthermore, the heavier a voice was to become, the heavier the roles were which were sung during the early years of a singer's career. It was more common for the dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos to include mezzo-soprano roles in their repertoire. This could possibly point to misclassification when these singers were young, which supports Miller's (1996) theory that it occurs more often in sopranos with larger voices. On the other hand, the often-darker colour of these voices might suit the requirements of some of the mezzo-soprano roles.

5.2.2 In which *fach* did this select group of sopranos sing during the later stages of their careers?

Amongst the spinto sopranos, Mattila is somewhat of an anomaly. While she gradually moved away from spinto roles into the dramatic and even Wagnerian repertoire, she recently made the surprising move to take on the soubrette role of Despina in the Finnish National Opera's comedic adaptation of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Janowitz included a role from a lighter *fach* in her later years on the stage, the lyric soprano role Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. Tebaldi's later repertoire centred around spinto soprano repertoire, although she started to include some of the meatier roles

that are also listed in the dramatic soprano *fach*. There is some speculation that this is the reason for the vocal problems she developed at the time (Jones, 2003). Mattila is the only one of the three spinto sopranos to sing an exclusively dramatic soprano role, that of Kostelnička (*Jenůfa*), and also the only one to venture into the Wagnerian soprano repertoire. It is notable that these are roles shared by dramatic sopranos and mezzo-sopranos. Janowitz was the only singer to perform an exclusively dramatic mezzo-soprano role during her later years.

All the dramatic sopranos were singing the roles they are renowned for, as well as spinto soprano roles, during the later stages of their careers. A role which featured in the later stages of both Turner and Dimitrova's careers was Puccini's Turandot. Although Turner was best-known as a dramatic soprano, she did sing Wagnerian roles throughout her career, including Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre*). Recently, Davidsen has sung roles from the spinto/lyric, spinto, spinto/dramatic and dramatic *fächer*.

In the later stages of the Wagnerian sopranos' careers, they did not only sing the roles which they are mainly remembered for, but also roles from lighter *fächer*, particularly roles categorised under the dramatic and spinto soprano *fächer*. Flagstad was the only singer in this group to include a lyric soprano/mezzo-soprano role in her repertoire, that of Dido in *Dido and Aeneas*. Flagstad and Stemme sang roles listed under the dramatic mezzo-soprano *fach*, however, all of these are roles shared by sopranos and mezzo-sopranos.

It is clear that none of the singers included in the study sang exclusively in the *fach* which they became best-known for during the later years of their careers. The general pattern identified was that they all sang music from within their assigned *fach*, plus roles from the neighbouring lighter and/or heavier *fächer*.

5.2.3 To what extent did these sopranos sing across *fächer*?

It is difficult to determine the full extent to which the sopranos sang across *fächer*, as numerous operatic roles sung by the singers are categorised in multiple *fächer*. However, the data revealed that the spinto sopranos did not sing roles exclusively from the spinto soprano *fach* throughout

their careers. Within one operatic season, it was particularly common for them to perform roles from two adjacent *fächer*. In the first half of their careers, it was a regular occurrence to move between lyric, lyric/spinto and spinto soprano roles, whereas the latter half of their careers featured a combination of spinto, spinto/dramatic, dramatic coloratura, and dramatic soprano roles. Although they sang across *fächer*, role selection was centred on spinto soprano roles.

Likewise, the dramatic sopranos also sang across *fächer* throughout their careers. Unlike the spinto sopranos, the dramatic sopranos did not often sing roles from the lyric soprano *fach*, rather, spinto and dramatic soprano roles featured prominently. The only singer in this group to have sung several Wagnerian soprano roles is Turner, however, this did not happen consistently throughout her career. Davidsen has sung one Wagnerian role, but Dimitrova did not sing any. It is noteworthy, though, that the latter did not sing German repertoire, with the exception of Erste Dame, which she only sang at the start of her career.

The Wagnerian sopranos also sang across *fächer* throughout their careers. Initially, they did not sing any Wagnerian roles, but rather lyric and spinto soprano repertoire. During the second halves of their careers, once they started to sing Wagnerian roles, they no longer included lyric soprano roles in their repertoire. The combination of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian roles was prominent. Unlike the other sopranos in this group, Grümmer often avoided roles listed in the dramatic soprano *fach* (Rasponi, 1994), however, she did regularly sing dramatic coloratura roles.

From the collected data it is evident that no strict boundaries exist when it comes to *fach*. Instead, these boundaries are blurred. None of the selected sopranos sang exclusively within the boundaries of a single *fach*, instead, they sang in one or more additional *fächer* at any given time. Of these, the neighbouring *fächer*, both lighter and heavier, feature more prominently.

5.2.4 Main research question: To what extent is *fach* change reflected in the career trajectories of a select group of spinto, dramatic and Wagnerian sopranos?

The nine sopranos selected for this study did not sing exclusively in one *fach* during the different stages of their careers. Apart from the spinto sopranos, Davidsen and Dimitrova, the singers did

not sing the roles they are renowned for from the onset of their careers. The Wagnerian sopranos waited the longest to take on and settle into this heavy repertoire, indicating that the heavier a voice, the longer it takes to develop. It is also possible that the heavier voices were misclassified as mezzo-sopranos during their early years on stage, which correlates with the data collected during the review of existing literature.

During the peak of the singers' careers, they predominantly sang roles from the *fach* they became renowned for, as well as roles from the neighbouring heavier and lighter *fächer*. The spinto sopranos generally sang roles from the lyric, spinto, dramatic and dramatic coloratura *fächer*, the dramatic sopranos roles from the spinto and dramatic soprano repertoire, and the Wagnerian sopranos roles from all of the three heaviest soprano *fächer*.

The patterns regarding role choices are consistent between the mid-twentieth century and current singers. Considering the earlier group, Tebaldi and Janowitz, Turner and Dimitrova, and Flagstad and Grümmer all show similar trends and *fach* choices throughout their careers. To a certain extent, these patterns are also seen in the careers of Mattila, Davidsen and Stemme. However, Mattila's recent career indicates she is no longer performing roles based on *fach* allocation. She does not only sing roles from the *fach* she is renowned for and neighbouring *fächer*, but sings roles from five *fächer*, including some from the lightest and heaviest soprano *fächer*. The beginning of Davidsen's career differ from those of the other dramatic sopranos, as she is the only singer to have a break-out career. However, once she settled in the spinto and dramatic soprano repertoire, the patterns that emerged from her role selection are similar to those of Turner and Dimitrova. Stemme is the singer whose *fach* choices most closely emulates those of the previous generation.

Young singers can learn from the career trajectories discussed in this study. It seems clear that potentially large-voiced sopranos should not sing heavy repertoire too soon, but rather cut their teeth on lighter roles, to allow the voice to mature and technique to settle, as advocated by pedagogues such as Miller (2000) and Jones (2003). The evidence points to the fact that it is sagacious to make a somewhat gradual transition through the various *fächer*, before settling in the *fach* that best suits the qualities and capabilities of a particular voice. These decisions should be made by informed teachers and singers on an individual and ongoing basis. As illustrated in the

presented data, not all singers develop at the same tempo or, for that matter, follow the same trajectory. Within the context of this study, this fact is exemplified by the career, to date, of Davidsen, who has been singing roles in these three heaviest *fächer* from the outset. Judging by the general trends shown throughout the career trajectories of the sopranos who formed part of this study, it is evident beyond a reasonable doubt, that good guidance and informed decisions are central to healthy voices and lengthy careers.

5.3 Recommendations for further study

It would be of interest to conduct a similar study, using a different manual, such as Boldery's (1994) *Guide to operatic roles and arias*, instead of the Kloiber, Konold and Maschka's (2016) *fach* classification system. It is possible that the result will vary depending on the manual used for *fach* categorisation.

The same study can be conducted regarding other voice types, namely mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone and bass singers. This study identified patterns that emerged when comparing the career trajectories of heavy-voiced sopranos, with the intention of guiding potentially dramatic sopranos in the selection of repertoire. A study based on other voice types will aid young singers who do not directly benefit from this study.

Finally, an investigation could be carried out into the importance of *fach* for singers who are outside of the German opera system. Whether or not they are aware of the German *fach* system, a study can be conducted to examine the extent to which they adhere to the *fach* trends identified in this study.

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