



## How High Should Boys Sing?

Gender, Authenticity and Credibility in the Young Male Voice

Martin Ashley, Edgehill University, UK



September 2009  
194 pages  
978-0-7546-6475-8  
Includes 11 b&w illustrations

234 x 156 mm  
Hardback  
£55.00

'A boy sings...a beautiful thing' ([www.boychoirs.org](http://www.boychoirs.org)), but is it? What kinds of boy, singing what kinds of music and to whom? Martin Ashley presents a unique consideration of boys' singing that shows the high voice to be historically, culturally and physiologically more problematic even than is commonly assumed. Through Ashley's extensive conversations with young performers and analysis of their reception by 'peer audiences', the research reveals that the common supposition that 'boys don't want to sound like girls' is far from adequate in explaining the 'missing males' syndrome that can perplex choir directors. The book intertwines the study of singing with the study of identity to create a rich resource for musicians, scholars, teachers and all those concerned with young male involvement in music through singing. The conclusions of the book will challenge many attitudes and unconsidered positions through its argument that many boys actually want to sing but are discouraged by a failure of the adult world to understand the boy mind. Ashley intends the book to stand as an indictment of much complacency and myopia with regard to the young male voice.

A substantial grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council has enabled the production of a multi-media resource for schools, choirs and youth organizations called Boys Keep Singing. Based on the contents of this book, the resource shows how, once the interest of boys is captured in primary schools, their singing can be sustained and developed through the difficult but vital early secondary years of ages 11 - 14, about which this book says so much. The resource is lavishly illustrated by short films of boys singing, supported by interviews with boys and their teachers, and a wealth of animated diagrams and cartoons. It is available to schools and organizations involved in musical education through registration at [www.boys-keep-singing.com](http://www.boys-keep-singing.com).

### Contents

Introduction; The background; Singing as social control of boyhood; The physiology of the young male voice; Subjectivity and agency in the young male voice; Admiration of the boy; A child doing a man's work in a man's world; Angels in the marketplace; We can't sing like men, so we won't sing at all; Ambassadors and mediators; The future; Index.

### About the Author

Martin Ashley is Head of Research in the Faculty of Education at Edge Hill University, near Liverpool. After an early career in sound recording with the BBC, he trained as a middle school music teacher and taught for seventeen years in state and independent middle schools, including a period at a cathedral choir school. He has acted as a consultant for the UK government's National Singing Programme, and for the associated Choir Schools' Association Chorister Outreach Programme. He has recently completed a major project on widening boys' participation in choral singing with the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain.

[www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754664758](http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9780754664758)

# ASHGATE

To order this book please visit [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com), or email [orders@ashgate.com](mailto:orders@ashgate.com)  
A 10% discount applies to orders placed through [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com)