

Francesca Caccini
(1587 - c.1640)

Francesca Caccini has emerged as one of the most interesting and talented musicians of Western musical culture. Spanning the end of the Renaissance through the enormous musical developments of the Baroque era, Francesca demonstrated her talent by combining elements of both eras in her composition, participating in the transition from one to the other. Her father, composer Giulio Caccini, was one of the most active members of the Florentine, an academy that originated the concept of opera as drama with continuous music. His collaboration with Jacopo Peri resulted in the production of the first opera, *Euridice*, in 1600. Francesca's youth was spent in a rarefied intellectual and musical atmosphere where she received both a literary and a musical education. She learned to write poetry, sing, play the lute and harpsichord and to compose. The whole Caccini family was involved in the musical activity of the Medici court of Florence and as the years progressed Francesca, known as *La Cecchina*, a kind of songbird, developed into a virtuoso performer. She was the highest paid singer at the court in 1623. She gained an international reputation not only as a singer, but also as a composer and a respected voice teacher. Her first husband, Giovanni Battista Signorini, was also a singer. Their daughter, Margherita, became a nun and musician. After Signorini's death in 1626, Francesca married Tomaso Raffaelli, a wealthy landowner. At the time of his death in 1630, Francesca had a two-year old son, Tomaso, and was left financially independent for the rest of her life.

Caccini's compositions, including operas, entertainments and songs, were influenced by several elements. Her father's participation in the intellectual group which carried forth the ideas of Monteverdi's *Seconda Prattica* influenced her writing style. In this "monody," the new style of solo song, the text dominated the music, and expressivity was of paramount importance. These songs employed recitatives, simple dance songs of the later Renaissance called *balletti*, as well as lyrical vocal lines, predating the later aria form. Combining these elements in varying ways, the solo song now was able to express text and sentiment while satisfying the performer with eloquent phrases. Francesca was a fiery, willful and temperamental woman -- a real "diva" of her times. Her music was deeply influenced by her need to use her voice for both expression and display.

Although Francesca Caccini composed a great deal of music during her lifetime, all that survives today is her opera *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina*, (The Liberation of Rogero from Alcina's island), published in 1625, and *Il primo libro delle musiche* (The First Book of Music) of 1618. One of the largest collections of solo monody of the period, it includes 36 sacred and secular songs in various compositional styles; most of the poetry is by the composer. This edition includes the last ten compositions in the collection, designated as *canzonette* (canzonettas).

The term "canzonetta" literally means "little song." Its roots go back to the Renaissance and the form is a generally strophic setting of a simple text with a lyrical vocal line. In this collection most of the songs are early foreshadowings of the aria form, which would develop later in opera. They contain lovely and developed vocal lines that are expressive but not declamatory, reminding one that Francesca was *La*

Cecchina, a well-respected vocal artist of her time. Her voice, and that of her sister *Settimia*, has been described as “angelic” and “superhuman.”

The texts of songs 1, 2, 5, 6 and 9 are set well and treated carefully but are reminiscent of the “first style” where music prevailed over text. Songs 8 and 10 suggest the homophonic dance music of the *balletti* where the musical line follows the rhythm of the texts with few expressive ornaments. Songs 3, 4 and 7, illustrating the “second style,” show the interpolation of recitative in a freer, more expressive type of composition that allows the text to be elucidated. It is this style that pointed the way for the operas of the future to become vehicles for virtuosity as well as drama.

The texts in this edition, most of them by Francesca Caccini, are presented with her original capitalization and punctuation. The music has been transcribed into modern notation; the bass lines have been realized by J. William Greene. All bass figures are editorial except in those songs where they appear both in and out of brackets. Here the bracketed figures are by Greene, the others by Caccini.

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Barbara Staropoli

A Note on the Continuo Realization

In continuo playing less is usually more. These songs are therefore mostly realized in a three-part keyboard texture with the bass only in the left hand. Indeed, a two-part texture is sometimes used on weak beats to aid the forward motion of the rhythm.

A cardinal rule of continuo playing is to keep the top part of the realization below the solo voice and every effort has been made to do so in these realizations. Remembering that the figure also encompasses the vocal line, the third of a chord is often omitted when it is sounded in the vocal line. This makes tuning easier for the soloist while still providing a complete chord in the context of the overall harmony. Occasionally more florid gestures are included, such as a rolled opening chord in the manner of a lute, as well as brief fragments in the treble interpolated between vocal phrases. Continuo players are encouraged to add other such gestures according to the affect of the singer and the occasion.

J. William Greene