

**Like Father, Like Daughter:  
How Francesca Caccini Was Influenced by Her  
Father's Works, and How She Was Not**

Chantel Goodwin

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Progress only happens because the next generation of people build upon the ideas of the previous generation. True development into modern music could not have been possible if one generation of musicians completely renounced every musical or philosophical idea of the previous one, forgetting all they could have learned from them. Nor would this development occur if they never tried to add to the work of their ancestors, claiming it to be perfect. Because of composers who struck a balance between these new and old ideas, Renaissance music was slowly crafted into the Baroque style. One such composer, who built on the works of her father, was Francesca Caccini. As can be observed in an examination of her aria, “Lasciatemi qui solo,” Francesca Caccini aided the transformation of music in the 1600s by learning from the master Giulio Caccini, and adding to his compositional style a taste of her own, particularly influenced by her point of view as a virtuosic singer and performer.

Giulio Caccini trained his daughter, along with the rest of the family, in the new style which he helped to invent, the “stile recitativo,” which was invented to imitate real, dramatic speech from the Ancient Greek theater.<sup>1</sup> While she certainly absorbed this training, she also built upon it in her own way. Francesca’s father’s work of monodies, *Le nuove musiche*, is comparatively small standing next to Francesca’s *Il primo libro delle musiche* in several senses of the word. Her father published a book with the two standard forms of *arie* and *madrigali*, whereas Francesca includes works with a vast collection of types, including, but not limited to *arie*, *madrigali*, *ottave*, *canzonette*, and *motteti*.<sup>2</sup> *Il primo libro delle musiche* was also revolutionary because it was the first to include both secular and sacred works in one published

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne G Cusick, “A Soprano Subjectivity: Vocality, Power, and the Compositional Voice of Francesca Caccini,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women*, (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 2000), 83

<sup>2</sup> Francesca Caccini and Michele Massimo Ossi, *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618 : A Modern Critical Edition of the Secular Monodies*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 5, [https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/\\$N?accountid=9817](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/$N?accountid=9817).

collection!<sup>3</sup> Her work included ninety-nine pages of music, three times as vast as her father's publication.<sup>4</sup> Her works are on average, longer in duration than the songs in *Le nuove musiche*.

Each of the composers formatted their published works in a similar way; namely, they put their loftier works in the first part of their books, and their lighter songs in the last half.<sup>5</sup> It would in fact make sense for Francesca to feel confident in publishing so many of her songs in one place, as she was one of the most sought after singers of her day, and composed with the same grace and style with which she sang.<sup>6</sup>

Francesca's father was a performer, composer, and vocal pedagogue (teacher of voice.)<sup>7</sup> *Il primo libro delle musiche* is proof that Francesca, herself, was one of the great vocal pedagogues of her time, and even, arguably, of our time. Even while Giulio outlined and described the vocal trills and embellishments a performer should gracefully use at great length in his preface to *Le nuove musiche*, it can be argued that Francesca's work is more pedagogically impressive than her father's. The table of contents at the end of her work lists the songs by genre, which would have made it significantly easier to find material for each setting in which she taught women, namely convents and the court.<sup>8</sup>

She also appears to have organized many of her pieces in an order where one song seemed to answer the one before, in a witty manner.<sup>9</sup> Francesca's witt can potentially be recognized with the placement of the aria "Lasctiatemi qui solo," which means, "Leave me here

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<sup>3</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Carolyn Raney, "FRANCESCA CACCINI, MUSICIAN TO THE MEDICI, AND HER PRIMO LIBRO (1618)." (PhD diss., New York: New York University 1971), 52, <http://byui.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/francesca-caccini-musician-medici-her-primo-libro/docview/302606504/se-2>.

<sup>7</sup> Wiley H. Hitchcock, "Vocal Ornamentation in Caccini's 'Nuove Musiche.'" *The Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (July 1970): 389, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741245> (accessed November 22, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Susanne G. Cussick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court : Music and the Circulation of Power*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 94, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2148262638/bookReader?accountid=9817>.

<sup>9</sup> Cussick, 113

alone.”<sup>10</sup> The song she placed before it in her collection is “Nube gentile che di lucente velo,” which roughly translates to, “Gentle cloud that of shining veil,” according to Google translate.<sup>11</sup> While not exactly in the form of literal question and literal answer, she has certainly placed two opposites together in the line up.

There is no doubt that Francesca wrote her music from the point of view of a beautifully trained soprano voice. She was given the endearing nickname of La Cachina (the little magpie)<sup>12</sup> by those who heard her at the Medici Court.<sup>13</sup> In her scholarly article, “A Soprano Subjectivity: Vocality, Power, and the Compositional Voice of Francesca Caccini,” Susanne G. Cussick describes the vocal power necessary to sing in the *stile recitativo* to have been classified by the presence of qualities such as “flexibility, sensitivity to verbal and emotional expression, smoothness among registers, spectacularly rapid articulations of sound controlled by tiny unseen muscles in the throat, and, most important of all, breath control.” The soprano voice was thought to be a most powerful sound for rhetoric in the early 1600s, and the performers with such a voice were seen as powerful because of the natural ability they had to “subject” the listeners to the message of their song, partially because some believed the control of this “fire” of the voice was linked to a control of sexual arousal.<sup>14</sup>

Francesca’s vocal power and beauty was reflected in the way she composed her melodies. Not only were most of her melodies composed in the “most expressive center of the female

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<sup>10</sup> Alex Burns, “Francesca Caccini: ‘Lasciatemi qui solo,’: ‘Soften my Weeping,’ *Classical Exburns*, <https://classical-exburns.com/2020/09/29/francesca-caccini-lasciatemi-qui-solo-soften-my-weeping/> (accessed November 22, 2022)

<sup>11</sup> Google translate, <https://translate.google.com/>

<sup>12</sup> Wiley H. Hitchcock, “Vocal Ornamentation in Caccini’s ‘Nuove Musiche.’” *The Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970), 389–404. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741245> (accessed November 22, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Doris Silbert, “Francesca Caccini, Called La Cecchina,” *The Musical Quarterly* 32, no. 1, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1946) 50-53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/739564>.

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne G Cusick, “A Soprano Subjectivity: Vocality, Power, and the Compositional Voice of Francesca Caccini,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women*, (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 2000), 87

soprano voice,” but they were also written in an ideal way for the singer to sing with her best technique and beauty!<sup>15</sup> Every soprano finds it exciting to sing above the staff, and often has a sweet-spot around f or g in this area. Francesca’s melodies often included “an occasional f sharp or g to provide the highpoint of an ornament.”<sup>16</sup> This would most certainly have allowed the singer a virtuosic moment where her voice would ring out impressively in a fancy trill or other embellishment.

Interestingly enough, Francesca’s “Lasciatemi qui solo,” has a melody line that sounds relatively low in the soprano voice. However, the words in this song are meant to express an intense, heavy grief! The *stile recitativo* was invented so that the music would be slave to the words and their expression,<sup>17</sup> so Francesca is taking after her father when she obeys the words and places the song in a lower register of the voice. “Leave me here alone.”<sup>18</sup> Oftentimes in a soprano’s song, there will be dramatic high notes that are to represent an intense emotion, perhaps a cry or scream cutting through the melody high above the staff. Francesca was not going for such an effect in this piece. Rather, the text is more mournful in a discouraged way, as if the singer were giving up. The melodies in this work feel weighted, as if drooping, dragging down. The singer seems to be giving up in their grief and sagging down more than crying out in sorrow. One of the most poignant lines of the text in this aria, “Spiro su questo lido,” translates roughly to, “I give up on these shores.”<sup>19</sup> We are traveling out of the style of text-painting and

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<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Raney, "FRANCESCA CACCINI, MUSICIAN TO THE MEDICI, AND HER PRIMO LIBRO (1618)." (PhD diss., New York: New York University 1971), 52, <http://byui.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/francesca-caccini-musician-medici-her-primo-libro/docview/302606504/se-2>.

<sup>16</sup> Raney, 108

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne G Cusick, “A Soprano Subjectivity: Vocality, Power, and the Compositional Voice of Francesca Caccini,” in *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women*, (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 2000), 83

<sup>18</sup> Alex Burns, “Francesca Caccini: ‘Lasciatemi qui solo,’: ‘Soften my Weeping,’ *Classical Exburns*, <https://classical-exburns.com/2020/09/29/francesca-caccini-lasciatemi-qui-solo-soften-my-weeping/> (accessed November 22, 2022)

<sup>19</sup> Burns, “Francesca Caccini: ‘Lasciatemi qui solo,’: ‘Soften my Weeping.’

into the world of the singer's feelings and emotions to compose melodies. That is one of the main shifts into the Baroque time period, started by Giulio, and Francesca has taken up her father's work so beautifully in this aria.

While filled with unique riches and beauties from Francesca's personal voice, her melodies also hold many similarities to her father's. Inherent and inevitable in writing the *stile recitativo*, each composer tends to write a melodic line with a long, drawn out note on a syllable that would have been stressed in dramatic speech. One example of this can be heard at the very beginning of Giulio's "Amarilli mia bella," (measure 1)<sup>20</sup> compared to the phrase "Lasciatemi morire," (measures 15-16).<sup>21</sup> Both of the initial syllables are long, passionate notes. One of intense desire, the other of intense languish, both evoking the proper emotions of the text phrases.



<sup>20</sup> Giulio Caccini detto Romano, *Le nuove musiche*, ed. 1, (Firenze: li Here di Giorgio Marescotti, 1602), November 26, 2022, IMSLP.org, 12, M 1

<sup>21</sup> Francesca Caccini, *Il primo libro delle musiche*, ed. 1, (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1618), October 26, 2022, IMSLP.org, 38-39, Mm 15



Giulio Caccini also passed down the tradition of figured bass to his daughter, the main purpose of the chords beneath the vocal line being to accompany, rather than overcome or overpower the vocal line.<sup>22</sup> Of course the monodic melody had to be first priority, for that is where the words were held in the song. However, another notable difference between Francesca's work, overall, is the lack of specified instrumentation, which is very different from her father's practices.<sup>23</sup> There is evidence that Francesca accompanied specifically with the archlute in mind for the basso continuo, rather than a *chittarone*.<sup>24</sup> The lute was better suited for flat keys, which Francesca prolifically wrote in, rather than sharp keys, which was more suitable for the *chittarone*.<sup>25</sup> In her book, *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618 : A Modern Critical Edition of the Secular Monodies*, Michele Massimo Ossi theorizes, "Furthermore, although not unique in this repertory, Francesca's use of compound basso continuo figures seems to imply very specific voice leading when compared to her contemporaries. If one interprets these figures literally, they will find that they lie comfortably on

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Raney, "FRANCESCA CACCINI, MUSICIAN TO THE MEDICI, AND HER PRIMO LIBRO (1618)." (PhD diss., New York: New York University 1971), 52, <http://byui.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/francesca-caccini-musician-medici-her-primo-libro/docview/302606504/se-2>.

<sup>23</sup> Francesca Caccini and Michele Massimo Ossi, *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618 : A Modern Critical Edition of the Secular Monodies*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 5, [https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/\\$N?accountid=9817](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/$N?accountid=9817).

<sup>24</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 8

<sup>25</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 8

the lute or archlute but are extremely awkward, or impossible, on a theorbo.” Musicians today compose for the instruments they, themselves, love to play and sing to.

“The harmony in Francesca’s work lies midway between the modal tonality of the Renaissance and the unified major and minor scale patterns of the full Baroque,” Raney points out in her dissertation "FRANCESCA CACCINI, MUSICIAN TO THE MEDICI, AND HER PRIMO LIBRO (1618)." Not only is Francesca beginning to shift into tonal major and minor keys, she is also beginning to use more chromaticism and utilizes several diminished chords.<sup>26</sup> However, the further along tonality is developed, especially into the classical era, diminished chords are used more sparingly, which can mean that her use of them can actually be a reflection of her Renaissance roots, perhaps pulling more from the *seconda prattica* than the new tonal ideas of the Baroque era ahead of her. The *seconda prattica* is the style in which the words take precedence over the music, that the composer should bend harmony and rhythm to the will of the words, but only to paint the word with its meaning. This meant that when a composer wrote the word, “Love,” the music should reflect the feeling and meaning of the word, “Love,” even if the word was written into a context that overall would typically evoke a completely different emotion. The line, “I am wronged in love,” therefore, would not wholly sound sorrowful because of the text-painting of each of the words or phrases.

Raney further explains that, “Where the Renaissance used intervallic harmony and dissonance, Francesca used chordal harmony and chordal dissonance. Intervallic dissonance was used only for special emotional effects in *Il primo libro*.” In measures 16 and 17<sup>27</sup> of “Lasciatemi qui solo,” the word for death (Morire) is a prime example of how Francesca mixes the *seconda*

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Raney, "FRANCESCA CACCINI, MUSICIAN TO THE MEDICI, AND HER PRIMO LIBRO (1618)." (PhD diss., New York: New York University 1971), 52, <http://byui.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/francesca-caccini-musician-medici-her-primo-libro/docview/302606504/se-2>.

<sup>27</sup> Francesca Caccini, *Il primo libro delle muische*, ed. 1, (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1618), October 26, 2022, IMSLP.org, 38-39, Mm 16-17



*prattica* with the new recitative (dramatic speechlike) style of the Baroque taught to her by her father. The word dips into a chromatic C sharp on the first syllable, and becomes melismatic on the properly stressed syllable for emphasis and speech-like effect. The chromatic sound of the word could have been inspired by the text-painting of the Renaissance, for the musical setting of the word certainly sounds like death could sound, but this setting is also how one could imagine a performer dramatically speaking about death on stage. Whichever inspiration it was driven by, the C sharp is in fact one of those rare instances in her work that is an intervallic dissonance, rather than a chordal one.



One phrase which seems to show both a contradiction and support for the Renaissance text-painting technique in Francesca's work is "Dolcissime sirene," (sweetest sirens)<sup>28</sup> in measures 19 and 20.<sup>29</sup> "Sweetest" is simply set syllabically on an A, which is not unique from

<sup>28</sup> Alex Burns, "Francesca Caccini: 'Lasciatemi qui solo,' 'Soften my Weeping,' *Classicalexburns*, <https://classicalexburns.com/2020/09/29/francesca-caccini-lasciatemi-qui-solo-soften-my-weeping/> (accessed November 22, 2022)

<sup>29</sup> Francesca Caccini, *Il primo libro delle muische*, ed. 1, (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1618), October 26, 2022, IMSLP.org, 39, Mm 19-20

the setting of the opening phrase, which translates to a much more sorrowful word. “Sirens,” on the other hand, throws the melody into a melismatic siren song, much more reflective of the meaning of the word.

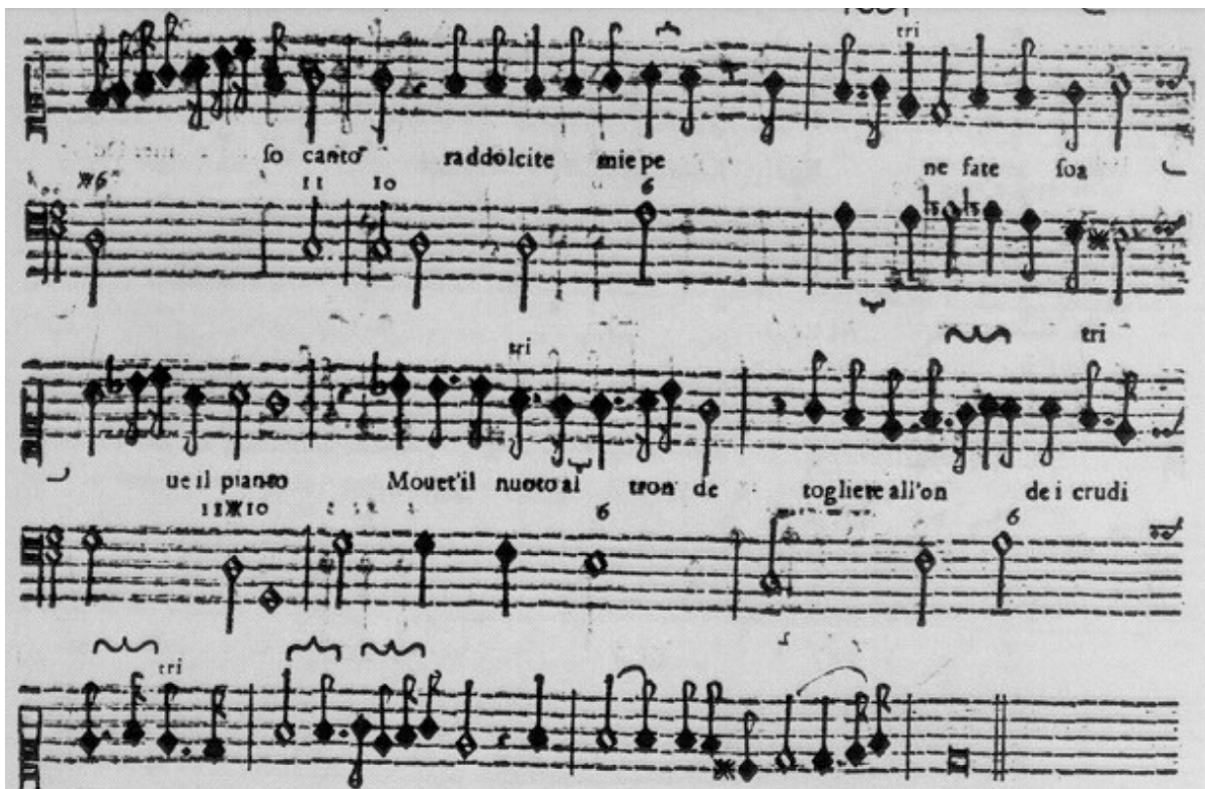


Another admirable trait taught to Francesca by her father was his ornamentation style, which she elaborated upon.<sup>30</sup> Every type of vocal ornamentation Giulio introduced to the reader at the beginning of his *Le nuove musiche* is also expected and implied in the works of his daughter.<sup>31</sup> Michele Ossi points out that “In *Il primo libro* Francesca, unlike her father, makes profuse use of the ornamental trilli (abbreviated tri.) or vocal tremolos, which occur repeatedly in all but a couple of the pieces.” The trillo, as Wiley H. Hitchcock translates and describes from Giulio’s preface, is basically the voice re-striking the note, or in another’s words, simply trembling the voice. In “*Lasciatemi qui solo*,” Francesca marks in the score more than a dozen trilli, compared to her father’s occasional written-in “tri.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Francesca Caccini and Michele Massimo Ossi, *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618 : A Modern Critical Edition of the Secular Monodies*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 5, [https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/\\$N?accountid=9817](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/$N?accountid=9817).

<sup>31</sup> Caccini and Ossi, 9

<sup>32</sup> Francesca Caccini, *Il primo libro delle musiche*, ed. 1, (Florence: Zanobi Pignoni, 1618), October 26, 2022, IMSLP.org, 39



To thoroughly compare “Lasciatemi qui solo” to Giulio’s works, one must look at both types of pieces written into his “Le nuove musiche.” Giulio’s arias are generally light strophic works<sup>33</sup> and his madrigals are through-composed. Francesca’s aria is loosely strophic, feeling more free due to the variations she sets each verse to. While formatted slightly different, there are enough arias in the work to get a sense of the style her father wrote in. The number of trills Giulio has written out in his arias section of *Le nuove musiche* can be counted on one hand. Outside of the aria genre, In his famous madrigal “Amarilli mia bella,” there is only one marking of “Trillo.” Francesca’s excessive use of trills in her publication very well could have influenced

<sup>33</sup> Francesca Caccini and Michele Massimo Ossi, *Francesca Caccini's Il primo libro delle musiche of 1618 : A Modern Critical Edition of the Secular Monodies*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 5, [https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/\\$N?accountid=9817](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2131035074/$N?accountid=9817).

artists in France. The composers of the *Rococo* style of music composed based on a similar, though more extreme, sense of continuous movement and embellishment.

In many ways, Francesca created her own unique musical voice, though she would even agree that she learned from and emulated her father in her compositions. Carolyn Raney cites a personal quote from La Cachina herself in her dissertation, in which Francesca said, “If possible, I should like to name my father where I praise the virtuosi of Florence, in such a way that he would be honoured by it, to speak of him as the master of the others, because I would not have it appear that I wished to depend on him through pride, but to acknowledge him as master.” And although Francesca wished to be an independent composer, her father seemed to recognize her as his musical heir, by leaving to her a keyboard in his will, made for a singer, teacher, and composer.<sup>34</sup>

Francesca built her works off her father in style, specifically writing in that transitional space of Renaissance to Baroque. She learned how to embellish a work from him and used this technique prolifically. In both the similarities to her contemporaries and her father, and in her unique attributes, her compositional voice guided the change of music into the more tonal, formal and virtuosic, Baroque style. Along with her stylistic contribution to musical history, helping music become the familiar-sounding patterns that are recognizable to the modern ear, she truly gifted music with a beautiful collection of sounds, pleasing to the listening patron and moving to the classical and modern heart, as was the objective of the *stile recitativo*, by publishing her masterpiece, *Il primo libro delle musiche*.

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<sup>34</sup> Susanne G. Cussick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court : Music and the Circulation of Power*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 110,111, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2148262638/bookReader?accountid=9817>.

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