Francesca Caccini's exact date and place (supposedly Florence) of death remain unknown. Until at least 1637, Caccini appear in the payroll of the Medici (Hill 2000: 1537), she left the court in 1641 (Cusick: New Grove); in 1645, guardianship for Caccinis's son from her second marriage is passed to the brother of her late husband (Cusick 1993: 507), possibly an indication of Caccini having died that year.

"sentendoli celebrare l'Adriana l'invitai [Marino] a voler sentire la Cecchina, et poi giudicare […] mandò subito all'improviso per il suo poema dell'Adone et trovato lo certo ottave lei cantò all'improviso senza neanche averle letto con tanto stupore suo, che nulla più, et tornato la sera seguente dall'Adriana con le stesse ottave si avide della differenza, onde tornò hiersera dalla Cecchina celebrando sopra tutti i soggetti di questa professione, essendo stato forzato a confessare che questa sia di molto più sapere, et padrona dell'arte, et in quell'altra alquanto miglior voce, et artifiziosa negli affetti, et così va celebrando per tutta Roma il valore della Signora Francesca."

"When I heard him [Marino] celebrating Adriana [Basi-le], I invited him to listen to the Cecchina [Francesca Caccini] and then pass judgement. (...) Immediately and spontaneously, he had his 'Adone' conferred and chose several verses for her that she sang on the spur of the moment without even having read them; this caused him to marvel more than anything else. On the next evening, he returned with the same verses to Adriana, eager to hear the difference. From there he returned to Cecchina yesterday evening and praised her more highly than all others in this profession, forced to admit that Cecchina had infinitely more knowledge and understanding of art whereas Adriana had a more beautiful voice and was more exceptional in the emotions. Thus he celebrated the abilities of Signora Francesca in all of Rome."

(Letter from Antimo Galli to the Florentine Secretary of State Dimurgo Lambardi, 11 November 1623, quoted from Crinò 1960: 180)

Profile

Francesca Caccini was one of the central musical personalities at the Medici court, both as composer and singer. As a member of the artistic family Caccini, she had access to a wide-ranging musical education, which made possible her later career as the Renaissance woman composer who is most renowned today. Two of her works – the "Primo libro" (1618) and the early opera "La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina" (1625) – were printed, unusually for a professional woman musician of her time, and enjoyed wide dissemination. As a "court singer" and vocal pedagogue, Caccini, stylistically related to the school of her father, Giulio Caccini, was also influential beyond Florence.

Cities an countries

Francesca Caccini's production as a singer and composer was primarily shaped by the Medicis and the artistic environment at the Florentine court. Alongside Florence, sojourns in Paris and Rome were of especial importance, as well as the years during Caccini's second marriage in Lucca, in which she as the wife of a nobleman was more active in concert organisation.

Appreciation
Francesca Caccini must, alongside Barbara Strozzi, be considered the most influential and best-known Italian woman composer, not only of the early 17th century. Although Caccini is frequently appreciated, above all, as the first woman opera composer ("La liberazione di Ruggiero", 1625), her career cannot be reduced to this. The position that Caccini acquired as composer within the Florentine court ensemble should not be understood as a separate special case of public composing by a woman, but in the surroundings of her composing colleagues independently of all questions of gender.

Caccini’s singing career, more strongly bound to norms regarding gender, began in the "concerto Caccini" of her father Giulio; it enabled her to achieve long-term musical and economical independence. Whereas Caccini did indeed fulfil the ideal of femininity of the court singer, tending towards a corresponding appearance and behaviour in addition to the singing itself, she made an impact extending beyond this. Unlike most of her female colleagues, she composed improvisatorily not only for her own performances but was also publicly active as a composer and vocal pedagogue.

Reception

The reception of Caccini during her lifetime placed her career as a singer in the foreground; this is to be understood before the backdrop of the relatively young figure of the professional singer, blending eloquence, beauty and courtly manners to form a very symbolic ideal of femininity. Her work as a composer (in Caccini’s case, even a published one) is also appreciated by her contemporaries but does not coincide with a popular ideal image. Composition, moreover, at least in the sense of improvisation and ornamentation, is part of the professional profile of a singer, and is additionally legitimised in Caccini’s case by her belonging to the Caccini family and especially through her father Giulio Caccini. It is striking, however, that Caccini, who was more successful as a composer than her female singing colleagues, was depicted already in her own time as vindictive and ambitious - thus not corresponding to the gentle image of femininity. Part of these descriptions are surely due to the pressure of competition at the court of the Medici, in the climate of which Giulio Caccini already stood in conflict with Emilio de’ Cavalieri and Iacopo Peri; but also above and beyond this, the attribution makes one sit up and take notice.

The reception centred more on the works themselves, beginning in the 19th century, regarded Caccini more as a composer, especially because of her published music-theatrical composition "La liberazione di Ruggiero" (1625), entitled by her as a "balletto". For all that, Ademollo uses Caccini as a kind of negative example, in order to depict the other singers described by him (Basile, Baroni, Archilei) who did not emerge as composers as corresponding all the more to the ideal of femininity (Ademollo 1888; see also Cusick 1993: 487). Too, a misogynous disregard of Caccini’s oeuvre was common practice until well into the second half of the 20th century (see, amongst others, Fortune 1954: 209, Silbert 1946: 50).

Repertoire

Caccini made her official public debut in 1600 at the early Florentine music-theatrical experiments in Giulio Caccini’s "Rapimento di Cefalo"; it is possible that she also appeared in Iacopo Peri’s "Euridice" (Hill 2000: 1536).

Beyond that, Caccini’s repertoire probably comprised most of her own vocal compositions for solo voice (she also wrote pieces for schoolgirls, see Cusick 1993: 498); also sections in stage works of Florentine colleagues as well as her own.

The tradition of improvisation of the late 16th and early 17th centuries must also be taken into consideration; this included improvisation on one’s own texts and those of others, allowing repertoire to arise far more spontaneously and also disappear again. Caccini wrote her own poetry early on; it remains unclear, however, whether or not she or others used these texts as the basis for improvisation (Hill 2000: 1536). The fact that Caccini, as was generally customary for singers of her time, knew how to improvise, is verified by the episode about the – also typical – improvisation competition on stanzas from Marino’s "Adone" between Caccini and Adriana Basile (Crinò 1960: 179f.).

Research

More recent research on Francesca Caccini begins with Ademollo (Ademollo 1888), whose incomplete knowledge of sources has led to incorrect conclusions which influenced researchers up to the 1980s (see, amongst others, Raney, Masera, Silbert). The central incorrect conclusion was the assumption that Caccini was no longer musically active after leaving the service of the Medici in 1627 and, moreover, died shortly thereafter.

Here, in 1980, is where Tim Carter comes in, quoting evi-
dence of Caccini's reappearance at the Medici court in 1634/35 in his dissertation ("Jacopo Peri (1561-1633): Aspects of his Life and Works." – Dissertation, University of Birmingham 1980). This was followed, in turn, by the research projects of Suzanne G. Cusick during the 1990s and 2000s, which have investigated and made accessible both Caccini's biography after 1627 (see Cusick 1993) and her position as a musician at the Medici court (see Cusick 2009) with extensive identifying sources.

Need for Research

Thanks to the works of Cusick (1993, 1999, 2009), who has also produced a monograph on the composer, Francesca Caccini has been relatively well researched. Desiderata formulated by Cusick herself are, on the one hand, further research on Caccini's years in Lucca (1627-1633), especially from a music-political point of view, and Caccini's commitment to female convent music in and around Florence during the 1630s.

In addition, a reclassification of Caccini's production between singing and composition based on the knowledge gained by Cusick would be desirable, as well as a more deeply penetrating inspection of Caccini as a singer compared to her contemporary colleagues, for she decidedly distanced herself from Ademollo's rhetoric of adapted and nonconformist femininity.

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