

**From Salon to Stage:  
The Genius  
of Female Baroque  
Musicians**

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# Caterina Assandra

(c1590-after 1618)  
[anonymous  
portrait]



Isabella  
Leonarda  
(1620-1704)

[anonymous portrait]



Francesca  
Caccini (1587-  
after June  
1641)





Barbara  
Strozzi  
(1619-1677)





Elizabeth  
Jacquet de la  
Guerre

(1665-1729)





Ospedale della  
Pietà/Vivaldi  
1703-38

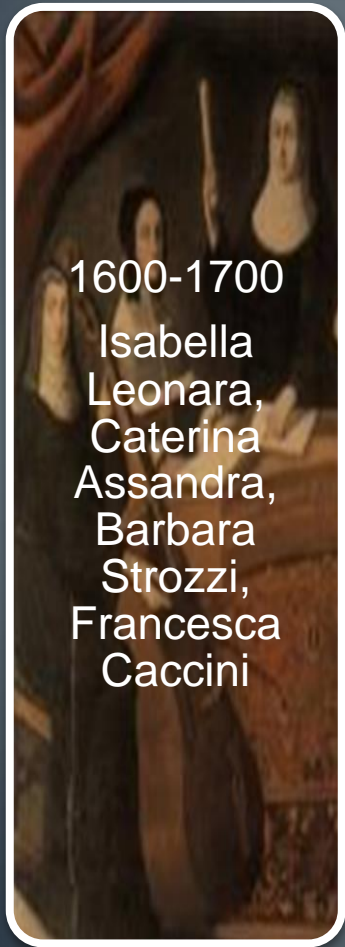


Marie Fel  
(1713-1794)





# Legacies Celebrated



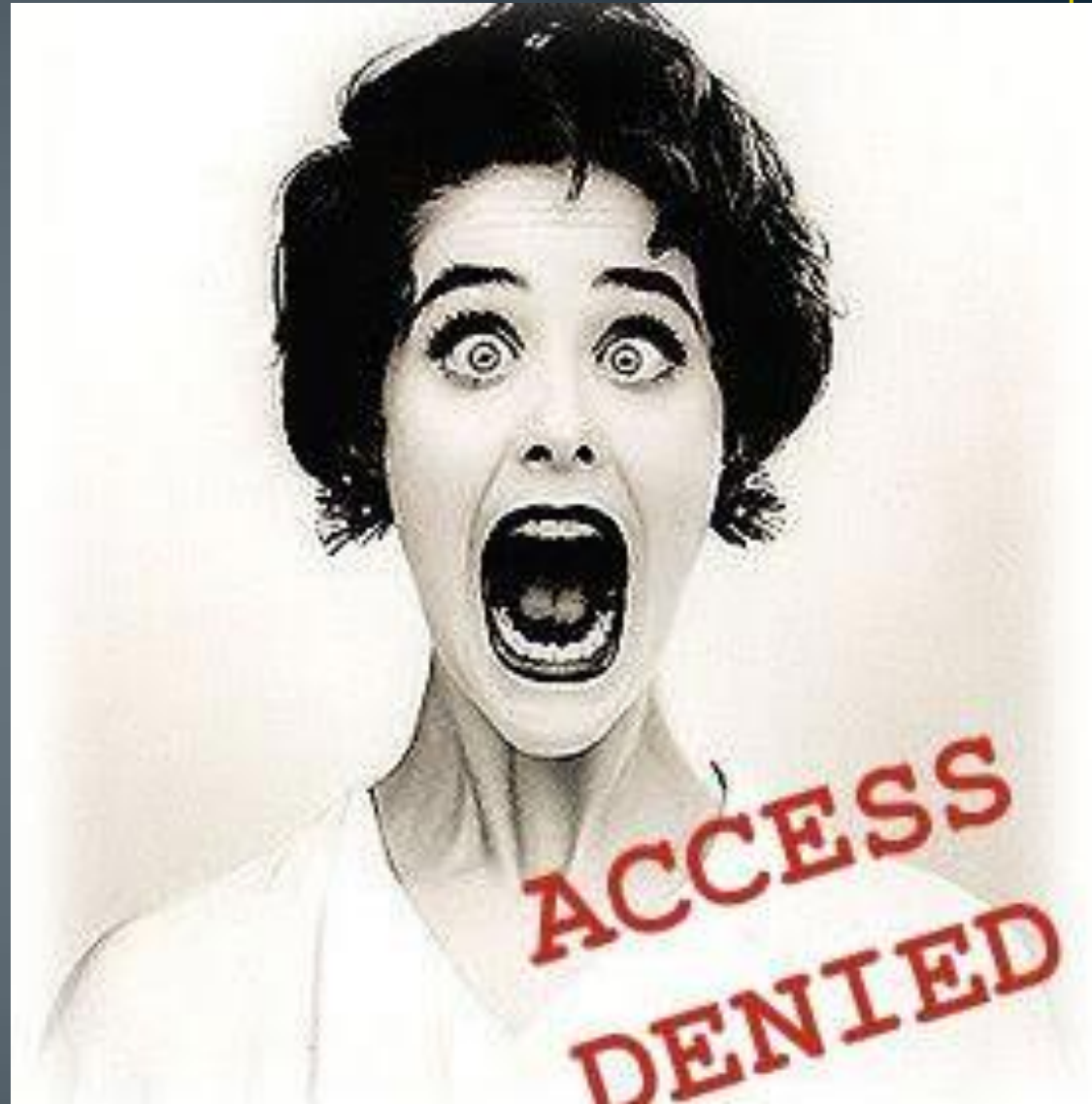
# Heated debate

“Music is completely injurious to the modesty that is proper for the female sex” (Pope Innocent IX, edict banning male music teachers from convents, 1686)

“Women have arrived at excellence/ In every art in which they have striven” (Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, 20th canto, 1532)



- No Training in:
- The Church (convents excepted)
- Civic Institutions
- Instrumental Ensembles
  
- Barred from posts in:
- The Church
- Court Chapel
- Civic Offices
- Institutions
- Instrumental Ensembles
  
- Music for:
- Display (as prodigy)
- Improvement
- Occupation



# Female Music-Making: Normative Parameters

- Instruments: voice, keyboard, plucked strings, viols
- Genres: vocal music; solo instrumental music, especially plucked strings and keyboard
- Performance, extemporization, occasional composition (usually to grace performance)



# Infiltration

- Female patronage
- Advanced education (musician/wealthy parents, convent)
- Child protégée
- Printed music
- Theatre (and later concert) stardom



# Female patronage



Isabella Leonara

Prominence of family  
gave women privileges  
within convent

Mother superior and  
convent council member



Francesca Caccini

Competition for her  
among leading  
patronesses; served the  
Medici Grand Duchess,  
Christine of Lorraine



Barbara Strozzi sought  
female patronage,  
through her dedications,  
three of seven volumes  
to female nobility





# Female patronage



Elizabeth: raised by King's  
mistress Marquise  
Montespan, for private  
concerts



Marie Fel, fresh to Paris  
(1735) regular singer for  
Queen of France private  
concert series (*Concerts chez  
la Reine*)



Vittoria della  
Rovere,  
Duchess of  
Tuscany



- Strozzi to Vittoria delle Rovere, Duchess of Tuscany: 'I must reverently consecrate this first opus, which I, as a woman, too rashly bring to the light, to the most august Name of Your Highness, in order that under an Oak-tree of gold [rovere=oak] it rests protected from the lightning-bolts of slanders prepared for it.'

# Advanced education



Caterina Assandra

- Prominent family, Pavia centre of learning
- counterpoint study with leading organist, chapel master, Pavia Cathedral
- Studied keyboard, viols, recorder, plucked strings



Isabella Leonora

Prominent family, Novara centre of learning

Probably studied with Casata, chapel master, Novara

Ursuline order defended convent education against Church restrictions



# Advanced education



## Francesca Caccini

- daughter, sister, wife and mother of singers
- Father leading composer, pioneered monody, basso continuo
- singing, guitar, harp and keyboard playing, and composition



## Barbara Strozzi

- Patrician father arranged for studies with foremost opera composer, Cavalli
- Organized music academy presided over by Barbara

# Advanced education



Elizabeth Jacquet de la Guerre

daughter, sister, wife and mother of keyboard players

King arranged for private tuition from aged five



Marie Fel

Daughter of organist; sister of singer

Studied organ and counterpoint with father Henri

Sent to Paris to learn Italian vocal technique, age 20 (old!)

# Advanced education



- Strict selection for *figlie di coro*
- Besides orphans, girls from patrician families, paying to be trained
- Rigorous instruction by top music masters (Gasparini, Galuppi)
- Concerted instruments: keyboard, all strings, woodwinds, 'exotic instruments' lute, chalumeau, flute, and mandolin
- all vocal parts SATB



Giambattista  
Tiepolo,  
Coronation of  
the Virgin

Fresco (1755)

In church of Santa  
Maria della Visitazione  
o della Pietà



Eleven instruments incl. horn, organ, viola, kettle drum, oboe, chitarrone doublebass, trumpet, violin, drum or tambourine cello =  
Pietà instrumentarium





Eleven instruments incl. horn, organ, viola, kettle drum, oboe, chitarrone violone [doublebass], trumpet, violin, drum or tambourine cello = Pieta instrumentarium





# Child protégée



Caterina: pre-convent training



Elizabeth: age 5 performs for king



Ospedale, most talented from age 10



Agent of  
stardom:  
Marie Fel



- Polite taste: from 1734  
*Concerts Spirituels*
- Specialised in representing love, high- and low-style
- From 1737 brought arias to print 'par Mlle Fel au concert des Thuilleries'
- Became a leading teacher
- After retiring from opera (1758) continues in *Concerts Spirituels* as its most popular soprano

