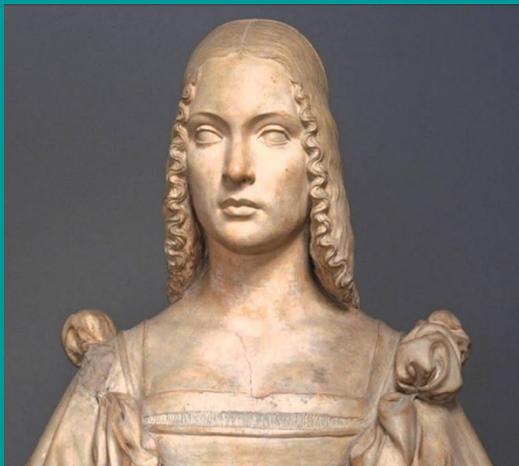


International Women's Day is a fantastic event where women from all over the world can come together to celebrate their achievements and stories. To contribute to this inspiring international occasion, I thought I would share the fascinating story of Francesca Caccini, one of the most renowned historic female composers and a woman I have found it inspirational to learn about.

So, who was she? Born in Florence in 1587 to Giulio Caccini and Lucia di Filippo Gagnolanti, Francesca Caccini was an Italian singer, lutenist, poet, teacher and one of the most influential composers of her time. Nicknamed 'La Cecchina', which means 'the songbird', she was one of the only women in Europe at this time to have some of her works published. One of her most famous works, "La liberazione di Ruggiero," is even considered to be the first opera composed by a woman.



Caccini's parents were musical, her father, Giulio, being an extremely famous composer and her mother, Lucia di Filippo Gagnolanti, a talented singer. Caccini spent her early life learning many different instruments and being gently introduced into the Florentine music world, along with her younger sister Settimia. It is thought she sang in a number of productions before becoming employed at her father's workplace - the Medici court. Here, Caccini's primary job was to teach and perform voice. Within ten years, Caccini had been married and widowed twice, leaving her with a son and daughter. So, in 1633, she returned to the Medici court where she continued to perform, compose and teach until her death. The exact date of her death remains uncertain, but historians assume it was after June 1641.



Both Caccini's compositions and teaching books were received with great critical acclaim throughout her lifetime. At this time, music was undergoing the transition between Renaissance music and Baroque music and a seamless blend of these two styles can be seen in her work. Caccini's achievements are all the more remarkable since she was a woman. Women were seen as the mothers and carers of the household, with strict standards to maintain. A woman's gender severely limited her opportunities in life, and Francesca Caccini was no exception. There was a great deal of heated debate by Florentine intellectuals over the roles of women in Caccini's lifetime, and the fact that she was a published composer was very unusual for a woman in this time period. Women also had to contend with

maintaining their families' social standing: interestingly, Caccini is renowned for forbidding her daughter Margarita to sing in a staged comedy for fear of tarnishing her daughter's reputation and therefore the reputation of the family.

So, why do I find Caccini such a fascinating woman? Well, I was amazed when researching for this article how challenging and difficult life was for women back then. With few freedoms and opportunities, I think it is extraordinary how Francesca managed to go through the difficulties of losing two husbands in a matter of years and the stress of raising two children whilst composing beautiful music that would be listened to for generations to come. Caccini is still highly respected in modern musical fields, with many composers taking inspiration from her works. Personally, I think that is nothing short of extraordinary.

Lara Worthy, 9J