Barbara Strozzi was a big name in 17th-century Italy. She was widely considered the most prolific composer of printed secular vocal music in Venice. Strozzi was one of the first women who dared to publish music under her own name. Many of the women composing during Strozzi’s time were forced to publish their music under a fake male name. She was the adopted daughter of the famous poet Giulio Strozzi. Giulio used his connections with the elite of Venice to allow his daughter to study music with a famous composer of their time, Francesco Cavalli. Cavalli tutored Strozzi privately, teaching her how to compose and write down her music.

Very little is known about Barbara Strozzi’s personal life. We do know that although she never married, she had four children. Her two sons were Giulio Pietro and Massimo. Her daughters were Isabella and Laura. Three of her children most likely shared the same father, but she chose not to marry him and decided to remain a single mother. Both of her daughters became nuns in a convent and one of her sons became a monk.

Strozzi published her first compositions in 1644. These were a set of madrigals with texts written by her father. She published eight other collections of music after her father’s death. Most of Barbara Strozzi’s music is for female voice and lute. Strozzi learned how to treat text with detailed attention in her composing from her father. She set the texts of her music carefully to develop a strong and beautiful relationship between the words and the music. In addition to being a composer, Barbara Strozzi was also a performer. She was a very talented lute player and had a reputation for being one of the best singers of her time, often performing for private parties and wealthy social gatherings.

Strozzi died in Padua in 1677 at age 58 after an illness that lasted over a month. Being a composer was rare among women during Strozzi’s life. In fact, only a few women composers came before Strozzi, such as Francesca Caccini. Male composers who visited Venice were surprised by her talent. Given the little information we have about Strozzi’s private life, it is clear she was an extraordinary woman of great talent and knowledge.
Quick Facts:
- A portrait of Strozzi named “Female Musician with Viola da Gamba” painted by Bernardo Strozzi (no relation) hangs in the art museum Gemäldegalerie in Dresden, Germany.
- Three of her children entered the church as nuns and monks.
- Her father founded a famous social group for the elite of Venice.

Selected Compositions for Listening:
Spotify Playlist URL: https://tinyurl.com/strozzilisten
- Cantate, ariette e duetti, Op. 2:
  - La Vendetta
  - L’eraclito amoroso
- Ariette a voce sola. Op. 6: Non paventoio non di te
- Diporti di Euterpe, Op. 7: Lagrime mie
- Arie a voce sola, Op. 8: Che si puo fare

Other Suggested Listening:

Learn More about Barbara Strozzi:
- Biography, discography, bibliography, and complete list of her works