Labalme’s impressive familiarity with archival sources and her persistence in following wherever documentary evidence led her make her writing informative about social practice, humanistic values, and governmental process in Venice on such varied subjects as marriage customs, sodomy laws, and women’s education. Throughout the volume runs a consistent theme of family identity and its importance for Venetian polity. Additionally, the essays demonstrate the generosity of spirit that Patricia Labalme brought to her engagement in scholarly research; without diminishing her own achievement, she credits the help she received, perhaps in recognition of the enduring friendships she made along the varied paths her life took. These essays are a tribute, in part, to her mentors, especially Felix Gilbert and Myron P. Gilmore. This volume provides, moreover, lasting testimony to Patricia Labalme’s scholarly sensitivity and accomplishment. Through the publication of her collected essays she remains a quietly inspiring example of what a woman can accomplish, using her wit, patience, and resolve, to widen our intellectual horizon about the lives of women and men in Renaissance Venice, spurring us, in response, to take the measure of our own civic and social lives.

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This book has been much anticipated for those who love early modern women’s relationships to music. Suzanne Cusick has an extraordinarily keen eye for those relationships in spaces often not found in traditional musicology. It has been a volume long in the making and reads with the richness of storytelling and the wisdom of a seasoned scholar adept at coaxing from primary documents a detailed rendering of what it meant to be a woman in early modern Italy fully experiencing her world. The provisional title of the book was “a romanescacosa of one’s own,” which for Cusick implies not the solitude hoped for in Virginia Woolf’s seminal essay, but
rather the contrary. Musical women must embody their spaces, to go forth into the world and engage with the complex, silencing tendencies of a patriarchal culture which described spatial, and especially vocal-musical transgressions, as sexual. Merely to open her mouth in the act of singing could define a woman as courtesan in Francesca’s time. Rather than proceed from the confines of what that meant for her, Cusick asks us to visualize instead Caccini’s remarkable abilities to negotiate, recognize, manipulate, create, and survive, both professionally and as a wife/mother/widow. The historical musicological canon has assumed that all women were silent, and therefore could not or did not assert their voices into any public space; as a result, these women have remained footnotes to their male peers. This book looks at the musical culture surrounding Francesca Caccini from her vantage point, with other players including prominent men rotating around her as she creates magnificent music and works at her job. In this viewing, men—from composers to political figures—whom historians might expect to feature prominently, surface only when they matter to Caccini’s story. The volume succeeds at Cusick’s stated objective: it is “a different way of doing musicology” (preface, xxxvi).

Cusick divides the study into eight chapters that tell Francesca’s stories as they position her in the musical, historical, and discursive patterns around her and also offers four chapters that give closer readings of Caccini’s music. Francesca Caccini was born in 1587, the oldest child of the composer Giulio Caccini and the singer Lucia di Filippo Gagnolandi. At the time of her birth her father was the second most highly paid musician on the staff of the Medici household, a position which Francesca came to appreciate and use to her advantage. At twenty she was appointed as musica on the staff of the Granducato of Tuscany, allowing her to pursue the most fully professional and productive musical career any European woman had yet experienced. Cusick looks at what it meant for Francesca to have been the well-educated daughter of one of Italy’s most prized musicians and how her father used his position within the Medici court to establish his daughter.

Chapter 3 is especially fascinating in its descriptions of the workings of the women’s court with which Francesca found herself closely tied and the ways this court offered a model of feminine accomplishment and
rule. At each turn, documents and letters from home and court serve to inform the reader without impeding the book’s elegant flow. Especially revealing is Cusick’s use of Cristoforo Bronzini’s *Della dignità e nobiltà delle donne*, commissioned by the two women who ruled Florence in the 1620s, Archduchess Maria Maddalena d’Austria and her mother-in-law Grand Duchess Christine de Lorraine. Published in four volumes between 1624 and 1632, it was part of an intensive program designed to justify female rule. A subject perhaps for another book entirely, Bronzini’s documentary helps Cusick formulate and describe a world where women actually did have a “romanesca” of sorts—a space of their own design and legitimacy.

Cusick intersperses the close readings of Francesca’s music with her story. Her aim is not so much to “analyze” in the musicological sense as to look at possibilities for Francesca’s self-determinacy. Cusick reads the *Primo libro delle musiche* as a teaching tool as well as a musical collection and suggests that it could offer both musical skills and lessons on how a woman might travel through the sticky terrain of being a public figure. Francesca’s only opera, *La liberazione di Ruggiero*, performed in 1625, becomes in Cusick’s hands a performative speech, relating to the political situation of Maria Magdalena d’Austria and offering the audience a convincing scenario for female rule. Most poignant is Cusick’s telling of Francesca’s marriages, the death of her husbands, and the social networking that allowed her to improve her status.

Caccini understood the musical and social world she inhabited, and this wholeness makes Cusick’s book a warm and vibrant narrative of Francesca’s *embodied* living. My only disappointment comes not from the book itself, but from the ultimate reality that we do not know, in the end, how or when she died. In two stretches called “Afterlives” at the book’s close, we watch Francesca disappear, perhaps because of age, perhaps because she was so well inscribed in her surroundings that mention of her was no longer necessary to those who made note of her. Perhaps, as Cusick imagines, she retreated to a world of study that she always loved. But curiously, the last document Cusick found for her is a letter from Paolo Giordano Orsini II. Francesca had written to him in Rome, requesting temporary lodging for a month because she had urgent business there. He
denied her because he had company. At least it was not the ultimate denial his grandfather, Paolo Giordano Orsini I offered his wife Isabella Medici, patroness of another musica and the first published woman composer, Madalena Casulana. Isabella was murdered by Paolo, who cut her throat, for many reasons, not the least of which was that she wanted to sing. Ah, the quirky threads of history, for I would like to imagine that Madalena and Francesca roam a sky replete with their voices, out in the world — a romanescas indeed, a musical way of being, for all to hear.

This is a splendid book, which I find full of hope, well worth the read, whether or not one looks for a “new way” of writing about women’s music. Saluti!

**Thomasin LaMay**
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In the first decades of the eighteenth century, a young and beautiful actress performing in the French provinces won the heart, or at least the jealous attention, of a male playgoer. He would not be the last man to desire Mlle. Clairon. Skilled in her craft, after her début at the Comédie-Française in 1743, she became a “great tragic diva of mid-century” (248). On the one hand, Clairon’s rise to fame points to the social opportunities, financial profit, and relative legal autonomy that life as an actress afforded some of France’s women by the eighteenth century. On the other hand, the rumors, lies, and misconceptions that swirled around her demonstrate that success on the stage also mired actresses in stereotypes that threatened to erase the memory of their artistic contributions. The Paris morals police accused her of “an absurd number of lovers” (35), and one man, in Rouen, who became obsessed with Clairon, penned a malicious libelle that dogged her the rest of her days. In her Mémoires, Clairon wrote that when the libelle “appeared,” her “pain was beyond all expression” (37).

Scott states a two-part goal: first, “to provide detailed and relatively credible information about the personal and professional lives of the