

# Tafelmusik

Baroque Orchestra

Jeanne Lamon, Music Director

## THE GALILEO PROJECT: Music of the Spheres



*Alison Mackay, the creative force behind The Galileo Project, has played violone and double bass with Tafelmusik since 1979. She has developed a whole series of creative programmes for Tafelmusik, among them The Four Seasons: A Cycle of the Sun, Chariots of Fire, In the Garden of Delights, Metamorphosis, Bach in Leipzig, and House of Dreams. Many of these programmes have toured the world. Her children's story The Quest for Arundo Donax, recorded for Analekta, won a JUNO Award for Best Children's Recording.*

### **You have created many unusual programmes for Tafelmusik. What inspired you to create *The Galileo Project*?**

I had been thinking for a while that it would be exciting to expand our experiments in “words-and-music” format to include some more theatrical elements and I was mulling over several ideas for themes. Then, in the spring of 2007, I received an email with an intriguing new idea from **John Percy**, Professor of Astronomy at the University of Toronto and an expert on variable stars and stellar evolution. On behalf of the advisory board of the Canadian division of the International Year of Astronomy, he proposed a concert in celebration of the 400th anniversary of Galileo's development and use of the astronomical telescope.

We approached The Banff Centre to see if the orchestra could develop its project at this cradle of creativity, and we received an enthusiastic response from them, which allowed us to plan in a more ambitious way, and to invite some of the most exciting people in Canada's theatre world to participate.

### **How did you go about writing a script and choosing the music?**

Researching and writing the script always goes hand-in-hand with choosing the music and the process usually takes about a year. I always work closely with Music Director Jeanne Lamon along the way to discuss the choices of repertoire. As you can imagine, there is a wealth of material to choose from – one of the hardest tasks is leaving out some of my favourites! Once the programme is chosen, librarian Charlotte Nediger prepares the music, transcribing some pieces from original sources, and making an integrated set of scores and scripts as well as individual parts for each orchestra member. Lucas Harris spent many hours reconstructing a lute concerto movement by Sylvius Weiss for which the orchestra parts have been lost.

**The orchestra memorized the music for this show, which is extremely rare in the orchestral world.**



Yes, because of the unusual theatrical aspects of this concert, the orchestra took on the monumental task of learning the music by memory – something orchestras almost never do. They worked hard in their own practice studios and got together many times to make informal archival recordings for private practice and to have “memorization parties.” Emails flew to share memorizing tips and to report progress. *(In the photo, left, the orchestra tests their memory backstage prior to a rehearsal on tour).*

**The images projected during the concert are breathtaking. How did you find them?**



We approached renowned theatre designer **Glenn Davidson** to collaborate with us as Production Designer. After he had completed his design for the lighting and set, featuring a 12-foot high round screen, Glenn and I met many times to choose the images. We were generously granted permission to use a collection of photos by Canada’s renowned astronomy writer and astronomical photographer, **Alan Dyer** *(photo top left)*. He and his colleagues at the Calgary Planetarium also offered the use of animated films about Galileo’s writings that they had made as part of a special programme about Galileo for the International Year of Astronomy. Drawing on these resources and the image and video bank of the Hubble Space Telescope, Glenn, Production Assistant **Raha Javanfar** and I worked at matching images to the meaning of the script and the emotions of the music. Projection Coordinator **Ben Chaisson** then programmed the images for our unusual round-screen format. Since the first performances of the project, we have been offered use of some stunning photos by Toronto astrophotographer **Stuart Heggie** *(photo bottom left)* and we have included several of them in this week’s shows.



***The Galileo Project* is a co-production with The Banff Centre. How was The Banff Centre involved?**

The Banff Centre was involved in countless amazing ways, first of all providing us with rehearsal space so that we could work in an intense way with our Stage Director, Opera Atelier's **Marshall Pynkoski**, who brought so much energy and refinement to the project. The Banff performance facilities, recording and filming studios, and of course, beautiful surroundings in which to experiment and work were also at our disposal and I will always be grateful to this inspiring community for its contributions to our orchestral life.



Most important of all, perhaps, the Theatre Arts department at Banff undertook the challenge of constructing Glenn Davidson's set. The department's Technical Director **Robert Rombough** (*photo left*) worked with stage carpenters **Bruce McComb** (*in work goggles, photo left*) and **Claire Prosser**, and scenic artist **Omanie Elia** to create the set in the Centre's workshops.

**The premiere at Rolston Hall in The Banff Centre must have been both nerve-wracking and very rewarding.**



*Dress rehearsal at Rolston Hall*

**Dyer**, whose images we had used. They were quite emotional at seeing their work set in the context of our music, and they gave a real gift to the audience by providing telescopes with which to view the moon in the dark Banff sky as Galileo would have seen it 400 years before.

The opening night was one of the most exhilarating and terrifying I can remember. Playing from memory and remembering the stage movements felt like a real high-wire act, but the intimacy and beauty of Rolston Hall allowed us to feel the warm response of the audience. Present that evening were the members of The Banff Centre who had given so much to the show, and a group of astronomers, including **James Hesser**, the Dominion Observatory, and **Alan**

## How is the project being shared with a wider audience?

The excellence of the sound and film faculties at The Banff Centre offered us the opportunity to experiment with the documentation of our concert. **John Adams**, Senior Recording Engineer, who has a longstanding relationship with Tafelmusik, and award-winning filmmaker **David New** worked with us in Banff to make an audio recording and several short video films of performances of music from the concert by Handel, Vivaldi and Lully.

Since that time we have been very excited to be working with **Gordon Henderson**, **Kate Viner** and the team at **90th Parallel** on a full-length concert DVD of the *Galileo* performance, which is available for sale on the **Tafelmusik Media** label.

Since the Toronto premiere you have taken *Galileo* on the road, performing in cities around the world. It must be quite a challenge to travel with the production.



*Pipa player Wen Zhao joined the orchestra in Malaysia and China*

Over the past year we have performed *The Galileo Project* around **Ontario** and the **U.S.**, and in **Mexico, Malaysia, China, Australia** and **New Zealand**. It is a much more complicated venture than our usual tours, but our brilliant production team has always mounted the show with great finesse, coping with formidable challenges from concert venues and airlines. Doing the script in a foreign language also means working with new actors in a process which has been greatly facilitated by the archival video that was made for us at The Banff Centre as well as the concert DVD.



*Students welcome Tafelmusik to the planetarium in Kuala Lumpur*

## What effect has *The Galileo Project* had on the orchestra?

A project about the wonder of the night sky, which is awe-inspiring for all humans, opens doors between the very specialized, Eurocentric world of our music, and people of other artistic traditions. Astronomy provides a common language which allows us to perform the music which is so important to us in new venues and contexts. For a

performance at the planetarium in Kuala Lumpur, the images were reformatted to fill the dome and we were able to experience the motions in the night sky in a thrilling way. In Malaysia we were able to experience the inspiring code of hospitality that brings performers and audience together around food and conversation.

The theatrical aspects of the concerts and the memorization process have also allowed us to interact within the orchestra and with the audience in new ways, which is something we have continued to build on in other projects.

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