

# Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra's Galileo Project at the Lobero

## Canadian Ensemble Celebrates 400th Year of Astronomy

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

Four hundred years ago, Galileo pioneered the use of the astronomical telescope and published *The Starry Messenger*, the book that set him on a collision course with the Catholic Church and heralded the arrival of the scientific revolution. In honor of 2009's Year of Astronomy, and as an outgrowth of the historic interest taken by scholars at the University of Toronto, particularly Stillman Drake, in all things Galileo, this February 2 concert at the Lobero was a multimedia presentation that wove the music of the period together with spoken excerpts and high definition projected images of the stars.

To put baroque music into its proper historical context poses only a minor challenge compared to what was attempted here—to put the history of science into a musical context where one could hear the paradigm shifting from one idea about the spheres to another. From Vivaldi to Bach by way of Lully, Monteverdi, Purcell, Handel, Telemann, and Rameau, Tafelmusik succeeded in tracing a massive pivot in the orientation of human understanding.

It takes several tactics to secure such a large aim. The first deployed was exemplary period performance practice. From intonation to an imaginative use of the Lobero space, Tafelmusik considered every level of their presentation. Long sections in which the musicians stood among the rows as they played punctuated entrances through the aisles from the back of the theater. To have players of this caliber on stage is one thing, but to hear them at distances of less than six feet was revelatory.

After the intermission, the orchestra recreated portions of the 1719 Dresden Festival of the Planets. This fabulous, month-long royal wedding ceremony employed both George Frideric Handel and Georg Philipp Telemann, and celebrated the ongoing ascendancy of post-Galilean, telescope-aided astronomy. The Allegro from a rare lute concerto by lutenist Silvius Leopold Weiss was a particular highlight of this segment. Narrator Shaun Smyth made a great addition to the group throughout the evening, and Tafelmusik saw fit to lend him an astronomical drinking song for his musical solo.

Still, nothing in heaven or on earth quite compares to the music of J.S. Bach, and so it was that the evening concluded with his Sinfonia, “How brightly shines the morning star.” Violinist Aislinn Nosky, her short red hair blazing against the starry backdrop, brought things to a climax on this, the final work of an impressive program.