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## **Images enhance music of the stars in conceptual orchestra's 'Galileo Project'**

By GINA KAUFMANN  
Special to The Star

Thirty years ago, Jeanne Lamon was a young violinist already growing weary of a career where she bounced from one performance to another with no larger goal in sight.

Then she joined the Toronto-based baroque orchestra known as Tafelmusik, a group with a consistent repertoire where “you could actually build and develop over the years a sound and a concept,” Lamon said.

Now the critically acclaimed Tafelmusik concept is coming to Kansas City in a big way with the U.S. premiere of “The Galileo Project: Music of the Spheres,” presented by the Friends of Chamber Music on Jan. 31 at the Folly Theater.

It's a cutting-edge, multimedia performance with images from NASA, the Hubble Telescope and live narration that marks the 400-year anniversary of Galileo pointing the first telescope at the night sky to discover craters on the moon, rings around Saturn and moons orbiting Jupiter.

Galileo recorded his observations through writings and drawings collected in a book called “The Starry Messenger,” which captured the excitement of a person seeing the universe take form before his eyes and sharing his enhanced vision with the world.

The question for Tafelmusik became, “How does an orchestra even begin to attempt to translate such a defining moment into music, on stage?”

Intrigued by this concept, these musicians last year decided to join up with visual artists and astronomers at the Banff Centre in Alberta. In their resulting “Galileo Project,” musicians play a baroque repertoire with a carefully coordinated set of breathtaking images from space and the portfolio of astrophotographer Alan Dyer projected behind them.

Meanwhile, a narrator breathes life into Galileo's experiences through words. As for the musicians, these are not stiff, tuxedo-clad instrumentalists standing still aside from whatever motion is required to eke sounds out of their instruments. Rather, they move about on stage, in some ways playing dual roles as musicians and dancers.

Choreography and a stage dark enough for projected images to be seen and appreciated mean something significant for musicians: no sheet music.

“It's a very different project from anything we've done before,” said Lamon, Tafelmusik's music director, during a telephone interview from Toronto. “What's particularly different for the orchestra is that we've memorized the entire program. It's very difficult to memorize a viola line because there's no intrinsic logic to it. It fits in the whole, but in and of itself, it sounds illogical. It's much easier to memorize a melody because you can hum it and it makes some logical sense. So people have gone the extra mile.”

She added, "Classical musicians don't tend to move around on stage a lot. It's been very mind-expanding for all of us."

Musicians are dancers. Science is art. The blurring of distinctions between creative and academic disciplines is at the heart of "The Galileo Project" on every level. Working with astronomers sparked Lamon's curiosity and inspired her as a musician.

The project "has changed my relationship to astronomy for absolutely sure," she said. "I met a few astronomers who are such lovely, soft-spoken, unassuming people with such a vast amount of knowledge. They get so excited by their field. ... They sense the slightest spark of interest from you and it's like, 'Oh will you come and look at my telescope?'"

The feeling is mutual. John Percy, professor emeritus of astronomy and science education at the University of Toronto, set the project in motion by writing a letter to Tafelmusik's bassist, Allison Mackay.

"I'm not a musician," Percy said. "I love music and I go to a lot of concerts, but this gave me an opportunity to do something I'd never done before, and it has to be one of the highlights of my astronomical career."

Bill Ashworth, who teaches science history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and works as a consultant for the Linda Hall Library History of Science Center, will give a lecture on Galileo before the performance.

"The history of science is a very important part of the history of culture," he said. "Too often, it gets left out. One thing we've done in our modern culture is separate out the sciences and the arts. In a sense, this performance is putting them back together again, and showing that science and art are different sides of the same coin."

Case in point: The copy of Galileo's "The Starry Messenger" that sits on the shelf at the Linda Hall Library contains not only text, but also drawings created by Galileo's own hand.

"He was an artist," Ashworth said. "Not only are these drawings important scientifically, they are works of art."

The images projected during "The Galileo Project" have a message both scientific and artistic.

"People are very visual these days," Lamon said. "The fact that you have this image, it makes the impact of this beautiful music that much greater. It will reach more people. Some people will love it anyway, but some people need a little help to grab on to it, because it's foreign to them."

These images might surprise even today's audiences.

"I think that people are a little less connected to the sky now than they might have been 400 years ago," Percy said. "One of my concerns is kids going on the Internet and seeing all this stuff and not realizing that this is real. I mean, there's a difference between what's real and what's simply a video game or something like that."

When Percy hosts star parties, where he points telescopes at the sky for the public, he shows his audiences the very objects Galileo observed with that first telescope.

"They're really wowed because it's their own eye, and they know that they're really looking at the real thing because you can point it out to them in the sky," he said. "There's this point of light, but no, when you look at it in the telescope, you see the rings, or you see the craters on the moon, or you see the moons of Jupiter."

The program ends with a quote from Galileo comparing the creativity of the scientist to the creativity of the artist and marveling at our ability using a mere 26 letters to write things down that will last 1,000 years. Or at least 400.

"It gives you goose pimples," Percy said.

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**THE SHOW**

Friends of Chamber Music presents "Tafelmusik: The Galileo Project."

•4 p.m. Jan. 31 at the Folly Theater; lecture at 2:30 p.m.

•Tickets: \$22-\$35; students 18 and under free. [www.chambermusic.org](http://www.chambermusic.org), 816-561-9999

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