



Galileo Project is out of this world

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CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC

The Galileo Project: Music of the Spheres

★★★★(out of 4)

Presented by Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra. To Sunday. Trinity-St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor St. W. **416-964-6337**.

It's a cliché to tell performers to reach for the stars, but one doesn't really expect them to accomplish such an outlandish goal.

Yet that's exactly what Toronto's Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra has done with *The Galileo Project: Music of the Spheres*, a multimedia programme being presented this week at Trinity-St. Paul's Centre.

Simply put, this is one of the best, most imaginative shows based on classical music seen here in years. Including intermission, these two hours pass as if they were 10 minutes. There isn't a single dull moment or off note.

The Galileo Project, fresh from its incubation and premiere at the Banff Centre earlier this month, celebrates the 400th anniversary of Galileo's astronomical telescope with a mix of music, words and high-definition images of space that converge in a mesmerizing treat for the eyes, ears and heart.

What makes Tafelmusik's participation especially noteworthy is that the players learned all the music by heart. It spans about a century and a quarter from Claudio Monteverdi, a contemporary of Galileo, to Rameau, Lully, Vivaldi, Handel, Bach, Telemann and others.

The hours of extra work the musicians have put in pay off in a vivid, concentrated sound. They can also now move around the stage and into the audience.

The stage is dominated by the gorgeous space pictures taken by Alan Dyer and lit by Glenn Davidson. Marshall Pynkoski provides seamless choreography for the musicians who move like stars and planets within a zodiac-inspired circle.

Actor Shawn Smyth interjects with texts that range from Ovid to Galileo to later groundbreaking astronomers Isaac Newton and Johannes Kepler. Smyth's nicely nuanced performance – which includes an 18th-century drinking song about astronomers – melds beautifully with the music.

The mastermind behind this show is Tafelmusik's bass player Alison Mackay, who not only has a good feel for historical detail, but has managed to fashion a natural dramatic arc for both halves of the programme.

The biggest wonder of all is how integrated the music, words and images are – like a balanced choir, where the individual parts, men and women, are subsumed into a greater whole. We often see multimedia shows where one element overpowers the others. We rarely see one that proves that multimedia can become an artform greater than the sum of its parts.

In the end, the audience is left with a true taste of the awe, wonder and optimism that people felt in the 17th and 18th centuries, as scientists pulled the veils off the myths and mysteries of Medieval times.

It's hard to come back down to Earth when it's all over.