

A decorative border featuring a climbing vine with green leaves and small pink flowers. The vine starts at the top left, goes down, then across the bottom, and then up the right side.

# Ode to Galileo

Oratorio for 6 soloists  
and SSATBB choir

\*

music and libretto

Joe St.Johanser

AD 1644

'...it was there I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner of the Inquisition, for thinking in Astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licencers thought' John Milton -  
Areopagitica.

## Ode to Galileo

### + Persons Represented +

Rachel Timkins - The Public Professor

Galileo Galilei - Prince of Physics

S. Maria Celeste - Galileo's Daughter - A Poor Claire Nun

Friar Tommaso Caccini - Dominican Preacher

Most Illustrious Lord Cardinal Bellarmine

Magnificent Carlo Sinceri - Inquisitor General

The Public Chorus - Tutored and Untutored

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## **Part 1**

### **The Public Professor**

When at Venice words and music  
Were sweetly joined, in sixteen ten,  
And Opera's long song was begun;  
To a Prince of Physics, the noblest of men,  
Logically occurred,  
A new thought regarding the Sun.

### **Chorus**

...words and music  
Were sweetly joined, in sixteen ten,  
And Opera's long song was begun.

### **Galileo**

The existence of Jupiter (in truth  
Philosophically speaking) is the case;  
Up there in the dark night sky.  
A small, bright, red point in the blackness of space;  
(If you can believe it)  
Up there what you see with your eye.

### **Chorus**

Up there in the dark night sky.  
(If you can believe it)  
Up there what you see with your eye.  
Up there in the dark night sky.

### **The Public Professor**

With a telescope he fashioned,  
So legend tells, from spectacle lens  
And sawn-off organ pipe,  
Galileo observed the dance of four moons  
Round Jupiter;  
And thought dropped, weighty and ripe.

### **Galileo**

Now the Sun's fresh new place one may (in fact  
Experiment reveals it), characterise,  
By the planets that roll round it's girth.  
From the sights in the skies, I a Scientist surmise,  
Earth goes round the Sun,  
And not the Sun round the Earth.

### **Chorus**

Galileo observed the dance of four moons  
Round Jupiter;  
From the sights in the skies,  
Earth goes round the Sun,  
And not the Sun round the Earth.

### **Part 2**

#### **The Public Professor**

Galileo determined to publish his news. He was on good terms with the new Pope - he  
felt safe from the Inquisition..

#### **S. Maria Celeste**

The happiness I derived from the gift of the letters you sent me Sire, was ineffable...I  
send several little fish-shaped pieces of marzipan; I think they will do you no harm... I  
thank you for the melons... I send you loving greetings.

#### **The Public Professor**

With excitement Galileo published  
'The Starry Messenger', his book.

### **Galileo**

"Worlds round worlds are swinging"!

### **Chorus**

The Inquisition's spies must look,  
Closely at it,  
As all Europe with the thought was ringing.

## **Galileo**

But...Ever ready with a denunciation from the pulpit were envious, venemous worms  
ready to take vengeance on their enemies.

### **Part 3**

#### **Friar Tommaso Caccini**

Galileo speaks detestable heresy with his talk of the Sun and the Earth and his  
Mathematics.

For Joshua spoke to the Lord; and he said in the sight of Israel,

"Sun, stand still at Gibeon,

And Moon, in the valley of Aijalon"

And the Sun stood still, and the Moon stopped.

Until the nation took vengeance on their enemies."

#### **Most Illustrious Lord Cardinal Bellarmine**

I order you Galileo to abandon the opinion that the earth moves and henceforth not to  
hold or teach or defend it; otherwise the Holy Office will start proceedings.

#### **Magnificent Carlo Sinceri**

We by the Grace of God, Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and especially  
commisioned by the Holy Apostolic See as Inquisitors General against heretical depravity  
in all of Christendom...whereas a book has appeared here lately, whereas with the  
printing of this book the false opinion of the earth's motion was being  
disseminated...whereas we did not think you had said the whole truth, we deemed it  
necessary to proceed against you by rigorous examination

## **Galileo**

Similar heresy slipped,

Into Bruno's brain, not long before,

And made him shout out in rapture.

Shrieking tongue pinned by iron claw,

Bloodlessly burned,

At the stake after eight years of torture.

## **Part 4**

### **Chorus**

The stage was thus set for  
Memes \* do battle, a famous trial,  
Authority versus reason.  
Three hundred years in denial,  
Until error was admitted,  
And Science no more was treason.

### **The Public Professor and Chorus**

Great wrinkled raspberry, stiff, soft and heavy,  
Two grey-pink, pregnant pounds of vein-streaked weight.  
Inside, Tardis like, wild landscapes marching,  
The worlds within form our mental estate.  
Green hills and meadows rolling, mighty rivers flowing,  
Electrically and neuronally defined,  
Promontories, capes, sun-soaked beaches decline  
Beneath light-blue waters vast and sparkling  
In full pelagic splendour, the Oceans of the Mind.

## **Part 5**

### **S.Maria Celeste**

... for the past several days, the weather having turned unusually cold for this time of year the plague has regathered its strength... since Lent the pigeons have been brooding; the first pair to be hatched were devoured one night by some animal, and the pigeon who had been setting them was found draped over a rafter half eaten, and completely eviscerated...

### **Magnificent Carlo Sinceri, Most Illustrious Lord Cardinal Bellarmine, Friar**

#### **Tommaso Caccini**

We by the Grace of God, Inquisitors General against heretical depravity in all of Christendom, say, pronounce, sentence and declare that you Galileo, because of the things confessed by you have rendered yourself vehemently suspected of heresy, namely of having held and believed a doctrine which is contrary to the Divine and Holy Scripture: that the earth moves. We order that the book be prohibited by public edict. We condemn you to formal imprisonment in this Holy Office at our pleasure.

### **The Public Professor and Chorus**

They had him on his knees,  
An old man of seventy.  
Guardians of our group mind,  
Big brothers thinking for us.

Circumspect, servile superstition or cerebral, superstring symmetry?

Grand universal theory, or gut thought?

Chosen race or selfish gene?

Blinding light or big bang?

Flat earth?

Free will?

You choose.

### **Chorus**

A meme knows no reason,

No rhyme and no sense,

In pursuit of new land

It will jump every fence.

Slap.

'Don't say ain't'!

Rap, rap.

Rulers and knuckles and seven times seven.

Clap, clap, clap.

Well done dear girl, you have got your certificate.

Now you may educate,

Do unto others,

Instil and pontificate

### **Galileo**

'I Galileo, seventy years of age, kneeling before you Most Eminent and Most Reverend  
Cardinals Inquisitors-General against heretical depravity. ... swear that I have always

believed, I believe now, and with God's help I will believe in the future all that the...  
Church holds, preaches and teaches.'

### **S.Maria Celeste**

word of your torment reached me, Sire, so intensely did it pierce my soul with pain to  
hear the judgement....my dearest Lord Father, now is the time to avail yourself more than  
ever of that prudence which the Lord God has granted you, bearing these blows with  
that strength of spirit which your religion, your profession and your age require...you  
must not make too much of these storms...

### **Chorus**

Who knows the laws of God?

Who knows the mind of God?

Eppur si muovere.

\* 'meme' - a term coined by Richard Dawkins to describe a mental entity - a belief, habit,  
custom, or behaviour pattern, that inhabits and competes for territory in the mind as  
genes do for DNA slots and animals and plants do for earthly territory. The winners  
inherit the territory, the losers cease to be.



