

GALILEO'S PASSION

Libretto by Jeffrey Lindon

PROLOGUE:

CHORUS:

Lux et in tenebris lucet
Et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt

SCENE 1: "The Pendulum"

GALILEO:

Ah! Ah! Magnificent! Sunlight wine is sunlight held together by water!

Benedetto, old friend!

BENEDETTO:

Master Galileo!

GALILEO:

And where is the Cardinal?

BENEDETTO:

He'll be along soon: he had private business on his way.

GALILEO:

Then you'll have to be my only witness. Observe and learn: it's all in the timing!

BENEDETTO:

Of course! even as a boy I observed that one man alone by giving these impulses at the right instant was able to ring a bell so large that when four or even six men seized the rope and tried to stop it they were lifted from the ground all of them together being unable to counter balance the momentum that a single man by properly timed pulls had given it.

GALILEO:

I could not have said it better myself!

Benedetto it's good to see you.

A toast: to my dear old friend.

BENEDETTO:

"To Sunlight held together by water!

I honor Galileo

More than any Merlot!

For greater depth one could not pray,

Not even in Cabernet!

In all matters where proof is concernéd,
He's as sure as Shiraz
His nose for the subtle flaws
Puts to shame the most learnéd.

Nothing soothes the soul
Like the king of the red oaks
Not even the goal
Of eternal rest
No man is as just
With as glorious high notes
Like sauvignon: the savant yon!

GALILEO:

I honor Benedetto
More than any amaretto!
Just like a Chadonnay's,
His buttery warmth brightens our days

For greater sense one could not hope,
not even from the Pope!
He is not noble it is true,
But all with him is virtue.

Nothing warms the heart
Like seeing an old friend,
Not even a quart
Of a vintage's best
A man you can trust
Is truly a Godsend
But the meeting of minds,
Is the greatest of finds!

GALILEO: [simultaneously]

Nothing warms the heart
Like seeing an old friend,
Not even a quart
Of a vintage's best
A man you can trust
Is truly a Godsend
But the meeting of minds,
Is the greatest of finds!

BENEDETTO: [simultaneously]

Nothing soothes the soul
Like the king of the red oaks
Not even the goal
Of eternal rest
No man is as just
With as glorious high notes
Like sauvignon the savant yon!

BARBERINI:

Master Galilei!

GALILEO:
Ah! Cardinal Barberini!

BARBERINI:
How go your... researches?

GALILEO:
As regular and orderly as... clockwork!
Would you care for something to drink?

BARBERINI:
No, thank you we cannot stay long Have you anything for
Suor Maria Celeste?

GALILEO:
It's ve-y kind of you; just these letters. Also if I might ask
about...

BARBERINI:
Your book?

GALILEO:
Yes, and my treatment
Of the Copernican system.

BARBERINI:
If you treat it merely
as hypothesis there should be no problem.

GALILEO:
Then I can trust in your protection?

BARBERINI:
Absolutely.
I have always held you in the highest regard!
In fact I have written a poem in honor of you!
I call it "Dangerous Adulation":

When shines the moon and heavens pass,
Its golden train a tranquil arc,
The sights of twinkling stars entrance.
We marvel everywhere at sparks,
Discovered Galilei by thy glass:
Jupiter's moons assentingly remark
And Saturn's entourage doth dance.

But when Dawn's light reveals new day,
The sun alone spreads from the East,
And shining beams enthral our view.
On sceptre's glory, kings may feast;
Adorned with gems the glints array.
Satellites thus in multitudes proceed,
Companions follow favors due.

That nothing could more blessed be

Than state of kingship all opine
Whom shrouds deceive with false displays.
What on the outside brilliant shines may not inside, Just as we
see, who would believe?
Black spots in Sun Divine?
To Galileo's art sing praise!

Truth, herald of salvation,
Unwelcomed, flees the mighty
Often an enemy proves more useful.

GALILEO:
Outstanding! And very forward looking!

BENEDETTO:
Yes, forward looking!
How science will flourish
When men like you are calling the shots!

BARBERINI:
The honor is mine!
Will I see you at the Grand Duke's state dinner?

GALILEO:
Naturally!

BARBERINI:
Excellent!
You know, I think I will propose a toast...
To science and the glimpses it affords
In-to God's mystery

GALILEO & BENEDETTO:
To science.

GALILEO:
Until the Duke's, gentlemen, farewell.

[Benedetto and Barberini leave.]

SCENE 2: "Bright Joy"

CHIARA:
Half a stem of hawthorne and some rosemary will warm your
heart. Here, Mama, drink this.

MARINA:
Thank you. Chiara, you know my time is near.

CHIARA:
Please, Mama, don't say such things.

MARINA:
I'm afraid for you, a young girl all alone.

CHIARA:
Mama, I'm not young anymore.

MARINA:
Not so young. Not so young, it's true.
Sixteen. Old enough to take the Church's vow.

CHIARA:
Mother, I'm not like my sister, Virginia!
I could never turn away from the world.

MARINA:
There is much about the world you do not know. A convent
can give you security and safety.

CHIARA:
Don't you see? That's why I must live here and now, to learn,
to see, to know. The darkness and seclusion of a convent suit
me not.

MARINA:
You don't know what you're facing, all the heartache and
suffering!
Chiara, listen to me!

CHIARA:
Mother, I desire more than you could possibly understand!

MARINA:
Ah! You're so much like your father!

CHIARA:
My father? Who is my father? All this time you've never told
me.

MARINA:
I thought it would be better if you didn't know.

CHIARA:
Please, mama!?

MARINA:
Yes, it's time you knew.

Think back to your childhood, you remember Galileo – the
mathematician you would sometimes go to see? His house was
filled with curious things with which you loved to play. He
wanted to marry me, but my parents forbade it: they feared his
ideas would bring me danger. I loved him so dearly, but I
could not defy my parents and the world. Oh, we was
something! So full of life and passion! When I was with him,
other people seemed like shadows, reflections. The night sky's
crystal darkness filled him with the bright joy of
understanding. At daybreak I would find him looking to the

heavens. He called me his "Morning Star." Even now I can
feel his glance bathing me like sunlight. His caresses wash
against me like the tides gentle, soothing. Galileo, I love you
still. Forgive me, I was afraid.

Chiara, your father's fame has spread now, wide and far. His
name is...Galileo Galilei.

CHIARA:
Galileo Galilei?

CHIARA:
Galileo Galilei? The famous Galileo, my father?
A thought reawakens, the memory is distant like the stars.
There is a room, full of people and laughter. There is a man, he
is holding me, pointing at something, answering my questions.
Inside, I am filled with light! Ah, that feeling of certainty and
promise. All that I had forgotten! Now everything makes
sense...

Mama, where is he now?

MARINA:
In Florence, near your sister?

CHIARA:
Can we not see him?

MARINA:
I'm so weak, Chiarini, I must stay with my husband, and I
need you here with me...

CHIARA:
I must go to him, can you not see?
The bright joy of understanding, that is what I long for, live
for. To know my father's name sparks a deeper understanding.

[*in duet with Marina*]

I am my father's daughter, in me his passion burns as well.
How much brighter fires burn when they are brought together.
All these years, all these years forever lost! Lost, as I have
been, not knowing him, not knowing my own true self! Now
my path is clear: I will reflect my father's light.

MARINA: [*with Chiara*]
You are your father's daughter, I've seen it in you all along,
Yet I could not bear to live without you, I need you here with
me. All these years! All these years have meant so much to
me! But dear God! How it tears me inside, tears me, knowing
all that I have cost you. Yet, without you, I would have faded
long ago.

Chiara, I pray for your safety, but I know now that you must
follow your path too, as certain as the planets follow theirs.

My path ends here, where years ago I made my choice. My star falls, so that yours may rise.

[*Marina settles and imperceptibly dies.*]

CHIARA:

Mama, please, stay awake a little longer.
Mama, please... I feel so close to you. Don't leave me here all alone!
Mama?! Mama?! Stay with me, Mama!

All alone in the darkness.
All alone in the silence of the night sky's multitudes.
Do the stars, as they dance, feel alone?
Do they ever hesitate or recant?
Do they shiver or falter?
Do their cries echo for eternity?
Do they struggle to alter their course?
Reach out to their sisters through the void?
The light they shine, is it fire or ice, passion or agony?!
All alone in the darkness...
Can you hear my cry, Mama?
Aah... aah...
Will you watch over me?
Please, Mama...

SCENE 3: "The Convent"

SISTERS:

San Matteo, refuge from malice and sin,
Closer to heaven these walls within,
Fixed on life everlasting,
Sacrifices we make for God above,
For Christ, our love.
Of Earthly beauty we know naught,
By poverty, we are taught.

CROWD:

San Matteo! Ever ready yet for life!
In the parlor! Blow the heady winds of strife!
Reawaken aspirations left behind!
Forsaken, veiled relations call to mind!
Breathe in! Let the fresh air surge and tingle!
Begin! Let the fanfare urge us mingle!
In the parlor!

SISTERS (*subgroup*):

How we yearn to move about,
How we burn for vibrant world without.
Let the breezes spin and swirl!
Pleasure seize us, sin unfurl!
(*all*)

Let us proclaim, as worlds collide:
"In God's name, we shall abide!"

ALL:

God above, hear our prayer!
How we long to breathe the air, to breathe the air, dear God,
our hearts desire to breathe the air!

SIGNOR:

Daughter, have you any news of the Cardinal Barberini?

SUOR OTTENZA:

He is here now in specting the order.
He is getting an earful, about our current so-called confessors,
who dine with us at will, even fraternizing! Then they go
about, spreading rumors and gossiping! Soon we will be
known as the "Poor, Poor, Poor, Poor Concubines!" Perhaps
the Cardinal can direct these wayward brothers to their true
calling: rabbit hunting!

SISTERS (*subgroup*):

San Matteo, refuge from malice and sin,
Closer to heaven these walls within...

SUOR PRUDENZA:

Lucia, have you come again to make amends?

LUCIA (*a prostitute*):

I seek forgiveness for my poor, wicked soul. I am lowly and
mean, and I despise my life. In the garden of my soul, the
devil's fruit ripens and rots. But here I find peace: God's vista
I see beyond heaven's gate. And so I pray and wait.

S. Prudenza holds out her hand, expectant. Lucia pays her. S. Prudenza blesses Lucia.

ZUANE:

Isabella! How I've missed you, Isabella!

SUOR ISABELLA:

Not so loud, Zuane!

ZUANE:

How I've *thought* of you, my vestal virgin!

SUOR ISABELLA:

Zuane... Here look, I've mended the collars you brought!

ZUANE:

Isabella, you're making a debtor out of me, Isabella.

SUOR ISABELLA (*overlapping the end*):

Zuane!

And yet it is I, I, who have been sequestered here, as if for that
very debt! And so it shall be, while the honey of my youth,
while the honey of my youth saps away in this purgatory!

ZUANE (*overlapping*):

Run away! Run away with me! Before the honey of your youth saps away!

SISTERS & CROWD:

San Matteo, San Matteo, San Matteo, mmm.

CROWD & SISTERS (*subgroup*):

San Matteo, ever ready yet for life!

In the parlor, blow the heady winds of strife!

CROWD & SISTERS (*Other subgroup*):

Reawaken aspirations left behind! Forsaken, veiled relations call to mind!

ALL:

Breathe in! Let the fresh air surge and tingle!

Begin! Let the fanfare urge us mingle

In the parlor!

God above, hear our prayer!

How we long to breathe the air, to breathe the air, dear God, our hearts desire to breathe the air!

BARBERINI:

Suor Maria Celeste, you look even more radiant the ever!

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Most Illustrious Sire, you are too kind.

BENEDETTO:

Since you know us, we trust you to be perfectly frank about the problems the convent faces.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Of course.

CHIARA:

Virginia?

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

For give me, Sires: my sister, Chiara. Cardinal Barberini. Father Benedetto. Benedetto studied with Father.

CHIARA:

Oh! Have you any news of him?

BARBERINI:

He is well. In fact we saw him just days ago. Suor Maria Celeste, he sent you these letters. Tomorrow night at the Grand Duke's there is a State Dinner. Perhaps Chiara would like to meet her father there?

CHIARA:

Oh yes!

Who calls me by my long forsaken name?

CHIARA:

Virginia, 'tis I, your father's daughter, Chiara.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Chiara? Is it really you? You have grown so much since the last time I saw you!

CHIARA:

Virginia, Mother has died.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Dear God! When?

CHIARA:

Two weeks ago.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

I pray for her eternal soul.

BENEDETTO:

Ah, Marina! Marina, Marina!

BARBERINI (*simultaneously*):

Sad news! Such sad news, indeed!

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Two weeks ago, ill-fated night. I awoke in a sweat! For a moment, I could not breathe... I listened, fearing an evil spirit, but all I heard was the heavy beating of my heart and the sound of Mama's voice singing: mmm... mmm... mmm... ah... oh... mmm... ah...

Chiara, have you come to seek shelter here?

CHIARA:

No, I have come to bring you the news and to see Father. I can barely remember him.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

BARBERINI:

Benedetto, why don't you escort Chiara there.

CHIARA:

Would it be alright?

BENEDETTO:

It would be my pleasure! Galileo will surely be happy to see you!

CHIARA:

Is it really true you studied with my father?

BENEDETTO:

Oh yes!

CHIARA:

You must tell me all about him!

BENEDETTO:

It seems we have much to talk about...

CHIARA:

Farewell for now, Virginia.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

I will pray for you, and for Father, and Mother...

BARBERINI:

Suor Maria Celeste, when Galileo brought you to me to ask for my dispensation, even then, you were so pure and innocent.

Child, do you ever think of me as your spiritual father?

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

As much as any father of the Church, Sire.

BARBERINI:

If there is ever anything I can do for you, anything at all, promise me, you will let me know.

SUOR MARIA CELESTE:

Thank you, Sire. You are and have always been most kind to me.

He leaves.

SUOR PRUDENZA (*to S. Maria Celeste*):

That man, is hiding something, hiding something...

CROWD/SISTERS (*antiphonal*):

San Matteo / Refuge from malice and sin

Ever striving / Fixed on life everlasting

Reawaken / Closer to heaven

Aspirations / these walls within

Begin! / Of Earthly beauty we know naught

Fresh air, breathe in! / By poverty

In the parlor! / we are taught.