



University
of Victoria
Theatre

The Moons of Jupiter

A NEW PLAY BY JENNIFER WISE

In celebration of the International Year of Astronomy 2009, a new play is being developed that reveals the complicated family dynamics of the acclaimed physicist, mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, Galileo.

PlayWorkshop Process

November 2-24, 2009
Phoenix Theatre,
Department of Theatre

For other events celebrating the
International Year of Astronomy 2009
visit:

www.astronomy2009.ca
www.hia.nrc.gc.ca

Department of Theatre & Phoenix Theatre Media Contact:

Adrienne Holierhoek
Marketing & Communications Manager,
Department of Theatre
email: aholierh@finearts.uvic.ca
www.phoenixtheatres.ca
250-721-7992

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UVIC CREATES NEW PLAY FOR INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ASTRONOMY

UVic theatre professor reveals Galileo's personal world in
"The Moons of Jupiter"

Jennifer Wise was moved, and a little appalled, by the contradictions of Galileo's life.

A theatre historian, playwright and professor at the University of Victoria's Department of Theatre, Wise found the dichotomy between Galileo, the scientist and Galileo, the father of three children, fascinating. She has combined her various passions through the creation a new play about Galileo in honour of the 400th anniversary of telescope-assisted astronomy. Wise has been researching and writing *The Moons of Jupiter* as the Department of Theatre's contribution to the International Year of Astronomy, a world-wide celebration of the moment in 1609 when Galileo first turned his "spyglass" on the heavens.

Since that time, Galileo's name has become almost synonymous with scientific progress, and remains one of the most famous in the history of astronomy. But his life and legacy are actually much more interesting, and controversial, than the myths that sprang up round him would lead us to expect. Says Wise, "Indeed, Galileo's life is riddled with troubling questions, questions that cut to the very heart of his reputation as a scientist and a man."

A successful physicist, mathematician, philosopher and astronomer, Galileo is regarded as the father of modern science. Working with descriptions of the telescope invented by Hans Lippershey, Galileo developed the telescope to reach 30x magnification and used it to map the planets and stars, including the discovery of Jupiter's orbiting satellite moons. He advocated – contrary to the interpretation of the scripture at the time – that the world was not the centre of the universe and that it orbited around the sun. He was tried at the Inquisition, deemed "vehemently suspect of heresy," forced to recant and live under house arrest for the remainder of his life.

Lesser known to the world is the family context in which Galileo accomplished his celebrated deeds. He had full custody of his three children – from a woman he refused to marry – but sent his two daughters sent to live the entirety of their life in seclusion in a convent at ages 12 and 13. The eldest, Virginia, was a pious nun who dutifully obeyed and lovingly idealized her father throughout her short life of 34 years. It is through her 124 surviving letters that scholars have attempted to fill in the details of Galileo's personal life.

Wise's play *The Moons of Jupiter* seeks to restore the voices of Galileo's other two children – silenced in the records of history – through the art of drama, reconstructing personalities, re-enacting historical events and extrapolating the human motives behind them. Combining her training as a sleuthing historian with her imaginative skills as a writer and actor, Wise brings all three of Galileo's children to the stage for the first time.

"His family revolve around Galileo like planets in a solar system and it is through their stories that we can begin to understand this philosopher and astronomer's entire life, not just his science," says Wise. "I discovered, through the process of allowing these marginalized historical figures to speak, that Galileo's family drama provides a surprisingly powerful tool for understanding his public life."

The Moons of Jupiter will be workshopped by UVic theatre students throughout November, 2009, with an eye to its inclusion in the Phoenix Theatre season the following year. An invitation-only staged reading of the play is scheduled for November 25 – 28, 2009. Other important collaborators on this project include science advisor Dr. Sara Ellison, Canada Research Chair in Physics and Astronomy at UVic, dramaturge Janet Munsil, Artistic Director of Intrepid Theatre and producer of the Victoria Fringe, and, as director of the workshop production, Dr. Sarah Blackstone, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts.



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Biography: Dr. Jennifer Wise

Jennifer Wise's books, essays, translations and articles have been published in three countries, in two languages, in popular periodicals such as Reader's Digest as well as in scholarly journals such as *Arethusa*. Her book about the invention of theatre in ancient Greece, *Dionysus Writes*, was nominated for two book awards in the US, and the textbook she created in 2003 for University of Victoria students is now a standard work in universities across the US and Canada. An Associate Professor of Theatre History at UVic, Jennifer also works as a dramaturge for new plays, and occasionally appears in the odd cameo role on stage and screen. After a false start studying acting with George Morrison at SUNY Purchase in New York, she earned her PhD at the University of Toronto, where she starred in *Chkhov* at Hart House Theatre, worked in post-production for television (*The Fifth Estate*, *Hockey Night in Canada*), and wrote theatre criticism for *The Newspaper*. Her translation of Aristophanes' *Frogs* was performed to critical and popular acclaim at the Phoenix Theatre in 2000, and at the Byron Theatre at the University of Denver, Colorado, in 2004. In addition to *The Moons of Jupiter*, her current projects include two scholarly books, and dramaturgy for a new play to be produced by the Belfry Theatre in 2010.