

The Pope should not rehabilitate Galileo

by Cincinnatus

Friends around Rome send word that there's a campaign being run out of a place called the Pontifical Academy of Science, to have the Pope—that is John Paul II—rehabilitate a fellow you probably heard something about, Galileo Galilei—Galileo for short. The short of the point is that some Jesuits, who were supposed to be Galileo's closest friends up to that time, cooked up a crazy charge against him, and had him tried and condemned by the Inquisition. They didn't burn him alive, like they had a fellow called Giordano Bruno a few years earlier, but they made life pretty miserable for him. The trial was a real stinker, almost as bad as one of those ABSCAM frame-ups we had in the United States a short while back.

Naturally, I'm pretty strong on justice, even if it takes a few centuries to get around to clearing a fellow's name even after he's long dead. It doesn't do the fellow much good, but it does get the chicken-bone out of our throat. Just the same, I think the Pope shouldn't clear Galileo's name in exactly the way those Nuclear Freeze fellows over at the Pontifical Academy are proposing. I don't go up and down the line with Giordano Bruno on theology and science, but he was burned alive purely and simply as a political favor by the Vatican to those Venetian fellows controlling the Hapsburgs at the time. To clean up Galileo's name and leave the injustice to Giordano Bruno hanging seems like rotten politics to me, and I don't think it's the right thing to try to push the Pope into doing. I'm not against the Pope's repudiating the nasty business the Jesuits did back then, but if fair is fair, the thing to do is to make a clean sweep, and denounce the whole business, or just let it lie.

Some friends of mine in Italy have looked into this Galileo, and have come up with some evidence that the fellow was pretty much a faker. Of course, the Jesuits were worse. The Jesuits really went out on a limb, insisting that a piece of fakery cooked up in Egypt, by a fellow called Ptolemy Soter, was rock-bottom Christian theology. The fact is, that Church canon law on the subject was laid down by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa during the time of Pope Pius II more than a century before Galileo's trial. By Cusa's lights, Kepler's astronomy was the brand that fit in with Christian theology, and what the Jesuits defended was heathen nonsense and fakery. In an honest court, Galileo would have walked out, scot-free, and

no doubt about it. Just the same, Galileo was a bit of a faker himself, like his father before him. He's not the kind of fellow we ought to go about praising as a hero to school-children.

The upshot of the problem is that Galileo had done his published work as part of a campaign against one of his father's former music-students, Johannes Kepler. To help this along, Galileo pretended to discover things he didn't discover at all. Not the kind of fellow I'd want my grandchildren to admire in school. A nasty tribe, the Galileis. I want to tell you a few facts about the fellow Galileo's father tried to destroy, a fellow named Gioseffo Zarlino, who lived from 1517 until 1590, the fellow who is directly responsible for making the music of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven possible.

There are a few of us, mostly musicians, who have been doing work on Zarlino for some years now. The main work is being done by a friend, a musician, in Italy, who sent along a progress-report a few days back.

The Inquisition against Zarlino

This Zarlino was born in 1517 in Chioggia, an island near Venice, and died in Venice in 1590, where most of the manuscripts still surviving from his work are kept. He was the only theoretician of music in modern history, that is, the only one who ever wrote a worked-out treatment of all the fundamentals on the subject. Beethoven got hold of some of Zarlino's writings toward the end of his own life, and you can trace the results in some of Beethoven's last compositions. Everything we know about the fundamentals of music today we have from Zarlino and his followers. So, you could say his work was pretty important. Naturally, Zarlino's work didn't come out of blue sky. Our friend from Italy has traced out most of the background.

During the fifteenth century, music reached a good level, particularly in Italy. Erasmus sent to Italy many Flemish musicians, then the most advanced in Europe. For example, Josquin des Prez was Maestro di Cappella at the Sforza castle in Milan during the period Luca Pacioli and Leonardo da Vinci were collaborating at the same castle. This Josquin des Prez, who was the greatest composer of his time, was the teacher

of another famous musician of that time, Adrianus Willaert, the music-teacher of Zarlino.

Don't think everything was fine and dandy, with all the smart folks sitting around enjoying Leonardo da Vinci singing, or hearing the music of the Flemish composers. The crowd which owned the Hapsburgs wanted no part of this music, and spent most of the sixteenth century pushing the Inquisition to stamp it out. Our friend from Italy reports on this fight.

Following the Dante tradition Adrianus Willaert considered music to be a science, and studied the laws of music as something coherent with the laws which control the physical universe. Their compositions were based on the development of counterpoint; the very complicated canons and fugues which they composed were a celebration of the discovery of new laws.

This didn't please the big mucky-mucks of that time—the ones called the “black nobility”—one bit. These fellows like to keep people pretty stupid, and this Flemish school of music wasn't helping to keep people stupid. They especially didn't like the idea of people getting into their heads that the universe was lawful in a way that affected every part of society's practice, down to painting and music. These “black nobility” were the “music mafia” of their time, and they also ran the Inquisition. So, things became rather tough for Zarlino.

The Black Oligarchs' Inquisition had to destroy counterpoint and scientific coherence in music. Since they had control of most cultural institutions, they were able to create two factions against Zarlino, a “right wing” and a “left wing.” We could say that the “left, Fabian wing” was the one made up of Claudio Monteverdi, which called themselves the “Chromatisti.” This included Luca Marenzio, Cipriano de Rore, and a notorious fellow, Prince Gesualdo da Venosa, notorious for murdering his wife. The “right, conservative wing” was composed of a group of “intellectuals” gathering in Florence at the house of Count Giovanni de' Bardi. The name for this right-wing crowd was “Camerata de' Bardi.” The leader of the musicians among this group was the father of Galileo Galilei, Vincenzo Galilei, who headed up a group that included such famous names of that time as Jacopo Peri, Giulio Caccini, Emilio de' Cavalieri, and a collection of poets including Ottaviano Rinuccini and Gabriello Chiabrera.

You could pass over some of the names—unless you're inclined to check out the research yourself. The important names from what our friend calls the “right-wing faction” are Vincenzo Galileo and the official philosopher of the group, a fellow called Girolamo Mai, with his sidekick, Jacopo Corsi. This crowd concentrated on attacking coun-

terpoint, trying to have it outlawed from music. They insisted that they were going back to classical Greek music! Their argument—which is a downright lie, by the way—was that classical Greek music was *monodic*, as a single singing voice with some accompaniment, like Jenny Brass and that half-drunken piano-player of hers down at the local saloon.

It is our good luck—depending on how you look at it—that some sensible Benedictine monk seems to have thought one of Vincenzo Galilei's two song-settings of parts of Dante too ugly to be the cause of future suffering. Anyhow, it seems to be lost. The famous part of Vincenzo's work was his attack against Zarlino's proof that the musical scales had to be well-tempered. The other crowd, Zarlino's “left-wing” enemies around Monteverdi, used different tricks. Our friend reports:

The “left-wing,” which was considered “modern” did not attack counterpoint. They attacked the traditional rules of the Flemish musical theory. This “left-wing” composed madrigals for four or five voices, relying more and more on hedonistic effects, and resorting to introduction of arbitrary dissonances to cause these effects, as in modern jazz music. They were called “Chromatisti” because they used all the chromatic intervals arbitrarily, without coherence, only for producing sensual effects, like Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner during the last century.

Zarlino had something to say about these “Chromatisti.” According to our friend, Zarlino attacked this nonsense in the Third Book of his (1573) “Istitutioni Harmoniche,” and quotes a translation he has done from the book, which I won't go into here. I wind this up with the business between Zarlino and Vincenzo Galilei. After Galilei had put out his “right-wing” attack against the work of Zarlino, Zarlino attacked Galilei by name:

He said that even though Galilei had once been his own music-pupil the results had been very bad, because Galilei had learned almost nothing. Galilei erupted, and published his notorious “Discorso intorno alle opere di Gioseffo Zarlino” (Discourse on Zarlino's Works). It was a smear-job of no musical-theoretical interest by comparison with the known musical theory of the time.

Maybe Vincenzo's boy, Galileo, learned a thing or two from the father's public embarrassment caused by that attack on Zarlino. Galileo never attacked Kepler's work directly. He was careful to be sneaky. I admit Galileo was treated pretty unfairly by the Jesuit fellows he was working for against Kepler. Just the same, we ought not to give Galileo much sympathy. When a fellow makes a living running errands, doing dirty work for a bunch of gangsters, it's hard for us to be indignant if the fellow runs up to us to say those gangsters he's been working for are treating him unfairly.