



January 20, 2025

Celestial Swansong

For the past six years the Griffioens have been sharing a slot in the Faith Matters batter's lineup: Keith tends to write about physics and Ruth tends to write about music; these were the two fields to which we devoted the past fifty years of our lives.

But writing essays, even brief ones, has become unmanageably difficult as we navigate a neurological bad card in our life's deck, so it's time to hang up our hats as scribblers. We leave with some final thoughts about our common interests.

In a recent article about the universe ("Almost Certainly Wrong" by James Vincent, Port 35), the author writes, "there is something fundamentally ineffable about the cosmos, an entity that is unimaginably old and unfathomably large, and which now absorbs some of the existential awe and mystery than in previous centuries was directed towards the divine."

Wait, what? Why the either / or? Thanks to the priceless gift that millennia of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition has given us, we can be in awe of the universe and in awe of its Creator with no loss to either. This also means that any new discoveries are a source of celebration, not fear. Look up at the night sky and rejoice!

Now, what about music? When cosmology and theology were younger, a beautiful theory held that as heavenly bodies moved through space they produced harmonies our ears could not hear but that our souls could detect, called 'musica universalis' or 'the music of the

spheres.' Our hymnbook still contains a modern reference to this ancient theory, now many thousands of years old: "All nature sings / and round me rings / the music of the spheres."

Music our souls tune to, what a concept! Nowadays we pay a fair amount of attention to what we put in our mouths. Is it healthy? Is it organic? Is it nourishing? We know what happens over time if we fill our bodies with junk food. What if we paid equal attention to what we put in our ears? What happens over a lifetime of junk listening? What if, instead, we tuned our ears and souls to the best of sounds?

So as a physicist and as a music historian, we'll sign off together with St Paul's timeless challenge: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

~Written by Keith and Ruth Griffioen

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