



Tinkle, tinkle little star: The real music of the spheres

Singing stars often attract audiences, but how often are they heard in outer space? In a colourful and lively lecture, Astronomer Professor Donald Kurtz will show how some stars ring like giant musical instruments and that some really are “diamonds in the sky” although these diamonds are the size of the planet Earth!

Professor Kurtz is the world’s leading authority on rapidly oscillating, magnetic chemically peculiar stars and his lecture will bring to life the “Music of the Spheres” which the ancient Greeks believed explained the secrets of the universe.

“Asteroseismology, the Real Music of the Spheres” is free and open to the public. It will be held in Harrington Lecture Theatre at 6.30pm on Thursday 8 May.

The ancient Greeks believed that the planets and stars were embedded in crystal spheres that hummed as they spun around the heavens, making “music”. Pythagoras thought that the orbits of the planets have harmonic relationships. Johannes Kepler centuries later was so enamoured with Pythagoras' idea that in the early 1600s he spent years trying to discover harmonic relationships among the periods of the planets in their orbits, but ended up proving otherwise.

For nearly 400 years the idea of the music of the spheres languished. But in the 1970s scientists began discovering the sun and other stars do actually sing, ringing from sound waves in them that cause them to vibrate, get hotter and cooler, brighter and dimmer, bigger and smaller and change shape. These sound waves cannot get out of the star into the vacuum of space, so we do not “hear” them directly. But scientists can detect that the sounds are there.

Anyone who would like tickets should contact Jodi McNeillie at the University of Central Lancashire on telephone no 01772 892347. However, Professor Kurtz regularly fills lecture theatres to overflowing and has even had audiences queuing round the block at the Edinburgh Science Festival, so apply early before tickets are snapped up!

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