

SILENT SKY is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.  
Commissioned and first produced by South Coast Repertory with support from the Elizabeth George Foundation

# Silent Sky

BY LAUREN GUNDERSON

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY  
*Jenny Giering*

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR EXPLORATION AND DREAMING...



# Letter From the Chair

Dr. Cynthia Allan,  
Department of Communication

Welcome to the 2019-2020 season of the Pittsburg State Theatre! We will be in residency at the Dotty & Bill Miller Theater here in the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts for during October, February, and April this academic year. Our residency allows us to provide students with the best pre-professional training possible to prepare for a career in the arts. Your attendance at Pitt State Theatre productions helps advance the cause of arts training and we appreciate your support.

The 2019-2020 season begins October 24-27 with *A Doll's House*, by Henrik Ibsen. Long

considered the play that opened the door to modern drama, this investigation into marriage and societal norms is as timely today as when it premiered in 1879 and has been produced numerous times in the past several years. Directed by Joey Pogue, this production will also offer a special school matinee for area schools.

Then, on December 6-7, we continue our tradition of Theatre Unplugged with the student-directed one-act plays produced in the Studio Theatre (entrance on Joplin Street). The Studio Theatre remains the venue for student-produced theatre productions and these one-act plays are sure to be engaging.

In spring of 2020, Megan Westhoff directs Lauren Gunderson's new script, *Silent Sky*, a funny, radiant, and joyful ride through the dream world of Henrietta Leavitt, one of the Harvard "computers" who helped map the stars and had a profound influence on the field of astronomy. Join us February 27-March 1 for this mind and heart expanding production.

Our final season offering, running from April 23-26, is *The Windshield and the Bug*, an original work conceived and directed by myself with additional material by the Advanced Performance Ensemble. This comic work looks at moments we think we've got everything figured out...or not. A light-hearted way to end the spring.

Remember, Pitt State Theatre offers Saturday and Sunday matinees in addition to our Thursday through Saturday evening performances. The faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Communication join me in expressing our sincere hopes that you enjoy the 2019-2020 season.

Warm regards,

Dr. Cynthia Allan

# Director Note

## Megan Westhoff

Theatre is about sharing, whether it's the stories, the ideas, or the experience. Given the opportunity to learn about the incredible female astronomers Henrietta Leavitt, Annie Cannon, and Williamina Fleming has been a great gift for me and one that I have loved exploring with our students. We are fortunate to now share this haunting and beautiful tale with you, our audience. These women persistently pursued their calling without the desire for acclaim. They received little recognition during their lives, yet their discoveries would forever change the way we understand the expanse of the cosmos. This story of Henrietta Leavitt is based on fact, a little bit of dramatization, and entirely filled with hope. For a moment, consider what takes your breath away and then wholeheartedly follow what makes you curious because as Henrietta says, "wonder will always get us there."

# Scenic Design Note

## Linden Little

*Silent Sky* is a contemporary play with a cinematic style. The script quickly jumps from place to place and from dream to memory. This dictates a scenic space that is open and flexible as each moment breathes into the next. The neutral foreground against the black background is a visual nod to the photographic plates of the Harvard Observatory. This color scheme also allows the star effects to pop into view, mirroring the excitement of Henrietta's personal and scientific explorations. These lyrical moments are brought back down to Earth by furnishings with sturdy details. Carved wood and rich colors give us a sense of place with only a few pieces. This tension between Earth and sky parallels the struggle Henrietta and her fellow "computers" face as they challenge social and scientific conventions.





Williamina, Henrietta, and Annie analyzing data



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# Costume Design Note

## Lisa Quinteros

The beginning of the 20th century was a time of dramatic change. Invention, industry, communications, science, medicine, and even homemaking were swept into what would become known as the Progressive Era. *Silent Sky* starts in 1900 and travels through the life of Henrietta, to about 1920. In that span, people went from riding in horse drawn vehicles and lanterns, to electricity and owning automobiles. So too did clothes change radically, starting with large sleeves and wide sweeping dresses, narrowing to suits with tucks and overskirts with the advent of WWI, and into the slimline 1920's with flowing fabrics and shapely bias cut dresses. The world these women worked in was one run by men, and as such they were businesslike and tasteful in their manner and dress, as befitted their role in the workplace at that time.

Time is of such essence for this play, as the vastness of space and the immensity of star time contrasts the mere few years we have to discover and explore our world as individuals. The work of Henrietta Leavitt and these women are a celebration and testament to the fact that we all owe homage to past women scientists, educators, and individuals who initiate change and produce knowledge... as much as we do to those of today. Discovery extends and creates the world we live in today, and for tomorrow.

In another 20 years, clothing may be radically different yet again from what it is now, perhaps with complete biodegradable fabrics and personal forcefield coats or multispectrum-visible contacts attached to our virtual computers and phones in air in front of us. There will be different social structures and technology, ways of mobility, maybe eventually even life among the stars. Let's insure that like Henrietta, change we create at the beginning of the 21st century is worth celebration and remembrance, and be the life astronomers of today...for the stargazers of our future. My thanks to my crew. And all the Henriettas who helped me... become me.

# Dramaturgy Notes

## Cooper Dammrich

As an individual and a student, I have a passion for learning and research; it was truly enjoyable to apply that love to a theatrical production. I had never done dramaturgy work before, but director Megan Westhoff and fellow dramaturg Josh Ramsey were fabulous resources and helped to encourage my work, making this an incredibly educational experience. Researching the world of this play was fascinating, especially because of how much historical accuracy and easter eggs the playwright Lauren Gunderson put into the script. I am wholly inspired by these prodigious women who did exceptional work in the field of astronomy simply because they loved it, despite receiving little to no notoriety. I hope all of the research Josh and I have assembled helps the audience to better connect to the story and characters.

## Josh Ramsey

My first experience with *Silent Sky* was when I saw a main stage performance of it at the International Thespian Festival in June of 2018. That was also the first time that I ever heard of the amazing Lauren Gunderson. When the performance was over, I was in the state of rumination that an audience should be left in if the ensemble does their job well. At that time, I wish I could have information to look at and discuss with my peers, but being at a festival, there is no space or time for that. So, I was ecstatic to take on a dramaturg position for this show. Two goals that I wanted to accomplish through this run were: to educate the ensemble to understand the importance of these significant women in the field of science so they can pull the audience into the rumination that I once found myself in, and provide the audience with the details that Lauren Gunderson built this incredible story around, while it is still heavy on their mind.

# Silent Sky

By Lauren Gunderson

Director..... Megan Westhoff  
Scenic and Lighting Design..... Linden Little  
Costume Design..... Lisa Quinteros

## Cast of Characters

Henrietta Leavitt..... Hunter Adamson  
Margaret Leavitt ..... Kathryn Huffman\*  
Peter Shaw..... Noah Smith\*  
Annie Cannon..... McKenzie VanMeerhaeghe\*  
Williamina Fleming..... Bella L'Heureux

## Settings

Time: 1900-1920

Place: A star field

The Harvard Observatory

Leavitt home, Wisconsin

Ocean liner on the Atlantic

Henrietta's home, Cambridge, MA

The play will be performed without an intermission.

# Production Staff

Technical Director..... Linden Little  
Stage Manager..... Scott Ladish\*  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Miranda Madden  
Dramaturgs..... Cooper Dammrich,\* Josh Ramsey\*  
Props Master..... Megan Van Wyngarden\*  
Props Assistant..... Noah Larson  
Makeup and Hair Design..... Tayler Matthews\*  
Makeup and Hair Assistant..... Miranda Madden  
Light Board Operator..... Cooper Dammrich\*  
Sound Board Operator..... Josh Ramsey\*  
Running Crew..... Ryan Bennett, Zoey Rankin,  
Garrett Wainscott\*  
Scene Shop Carpenters..... Mace Hinsch, Josh Ramsey,\*  
Kris Van Hoosen,  
Costume Construction..... Hannah Casper, Barb Davis,  
Tiffany Durbin, Miranda Madden,  
Tayler Matthews\* Ryan Bennett,  
Garret Wainscott,\* Kathy Sanley,  
Trevor Schoenhofer, Jenna Russell  
House Manager..... Kaden Kiwan

# Pitt State Theatre Staff

Production Assistant..... Cooper Dammrich\*  
PR/Advertising Manager..... McKenzie VanMeerhaeghe\*  
Poster/Program Cover/Banner Design..... April Ahlders  
Production Photographer..... Gracelyn Haile

**No photography or video recording is permitted during the performance. Please make sure ALL cell phones are turned off.**

**For the comfort of other audience members, take crying or fussy children to the lobby.**

\*denotes membership in Alpha Psi Omega, national theatre honor society



# *In Memoriam*



Barry R. Bengtsen in the Grubbs Studio Theatre

Barry R. Bengtsen, 1939-2020  
Award Winning Designer and Director  
Associate Professor for 32 years in Department  
of Communication  
Beloved husband and father,  
Mentor, colleague, and friend  
“Remember me in light”



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Margaret and Henrietta having a serious conversation



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Henrietta and Peter dancing





Henrietta, Annie, Margaret, Williamina, and Peter sharing ideas



# A Special Thanks

We thank everyone who provided invaluable services, materials, and support to this production. Our apologies if anyone is inadvertently omitted.

Pittsburg Community Theatre

Mimi Little

Kyla Scarborough

Joe Firman

Jon Eastman

Janette Mauk

Barry Bengtsen

Dr. Cynthia Allan

Lindsay C. Smith, Curator at Harvard College Observatory's Astronomical Photographic Plate Collection, has been a tremendous help to us with offering archival research for *Silent Sky*. The collection, also known as the Plate Stacks, is the world's largest archive of stellar glass plate negatives. Our production poster, along with many other productions, will now hang in the Plate Stacks. To find out more information about the archived work of Henrietta Leavitt, Annie Cannon, Williamina Fleming, and their female colleagues at Harvard College Observatory, check out the website at: [cfa.harvard.edu](http://cfa.harvard.edu)

# Serving Our Community

This season, Pitt State Theatre is partnering with Safehouse Crisis Center to assist them in providing for the needs of those in our community. We are collecting shampoo and conditioner, deodorant, and toilet paper. Donations may be dropped off during the run of the show at the Bicknell Family Center for the Arts. Please help us serve this important community resource.





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