



**EXPLORATION** and  
**PLACE**



**ICTREP**  
Wichita Repertory Theater

*present*

# SILENT SKY



*the unforgettable play*  
*by Lauren Gunderson*

January 22-24, 2026 at 7:30 PM

January 25, 2026 at 2:00 PM

*The Dome Theater at Exploration Place*



**EXPLORATION**  
PLACE

and



**ICTREP**  
Wichita Repertory Theater

*present*

# SILENT SKY

by Lauren Gunderson

*with Original Music by Jenny Giering*

*SCENIC PROJECTION DESIGN*

**JORDAN SLUSHER**

*COSTUME DESIGN*

**JULIE LONGHOFER**

*TECHNICAL DIRECTION*

**STAN LONGHOFER**

*SOUND DESIGN*

**KIRK LONGHOFER**

*LIGHTING DESIGN*

**STAN LONGHOFER**

*STAGE MANAGER*

**CHELSE PENNER**

*DIRECTED BY*

**JULIE LONGHOFER**

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[www.dramatists.com](http://www.dramatists.com)

# SILENT SKY

## Cast of Characters

*in order of appearance*

Henrietta Leavitt	<b>JILL NICOLE HERBERT</b>
Margaret Leavitt	<b>HOLLAND LEE KISER</b>
Peter Shaw	<b>JACKSON DORRIS</b>
Annie Cannon	<b>LYDIA PIRILLI</b>
Williamina Fleming	<b>BAYLEE BRASWELL</b>

## Stage Crew

Bronwen Burch    Jami Thomas

## Time & Spaces

*1900-1920*

*The Harvard Observatory 2nd-floor offices*

*The Leavitt home, Wisconsin*

*A Lecture Hall*

*An ocean liner on the Atlantic*

*Henrietta's Cambridge home*

***There will be a 15-minute intermission.***

SILENT SKY is Sponsored By



# CAST



## **BAYLEE BRASWELL** (*Williamina Fleming*)

Baylee is grateful to both ICTRep and Exploration Place for a beautifully unique opportunity to perform in the Dome Theater. Having grown up in Long Beach, CA, Baylee cherishes early memories at the California Science Center and hopes you continue to support live theater and science! She has previously been seen in Experimental Theatre Company's Theatre Lab, ICTRep's *Ms. Holmes and Ms. Watson - APT 2B* (Irene Adler), and with

her friends on Sundays. Thank you to Tom for helping her with her lines and happy birthday to anyone celebrating!



## **JACKSON DORRIS** (*Peter Shaw*)

Jackson is thrilled to be back at ICTRep! Jackson graduated from Wichita State University with his Bachelor of Fine Arts and emphasis in Musical Theatre in 2021. You may have seen him recently in *The Play that Goes Wrong* (Dennis/Perkins), *Ms. Holmes and Ms. Watson - Apt. 2B* (Moriarty/Lestrade), *Amadeus* (Venticello), and *The Play that Goes Wrong* (Dennis/Perkins) again! Jackson wants to thank God and his family for their constant and consistent

love and support!



## **JILL NICOLE HERBERT** (*Henrietta Leavitt*)

Jill is delighted to be back on the ICTRep stage portraying Henrietta Leavitt. Recent credits include Grace Richards in *Into the Breeches* (Wichita Community Theatre), Cecily in *Travesties* (ICTRep), Miss Prism in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (ICTRep), Gabriella in *Boeing-Boeing* (ICTRep), and she is also a proud cast member of ETC: Experimental Theatre Company. When she's not onstage,

Jill works as a graphic designer, happily embracing creativity in all its forms. She is especially excited to be performing alongside close friends and is deeply grateful to Julie and Stan for trusting her with the brilliance, curiosity, and heart of Henrietta.



## **HOLLAND LEE KISER** (*Margaret Leavitt*)

Holland is very excited to be back onstage at ICTRep. Patrons may remember her as Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Gwendolen in *Travesties*, and Gretchen in *Boeing-Boeing*. She also regularly appears on stages around town including Wichita Community Theatre, Cowtown's Empire House, Kechi Playhouse, and Wichita Shakespeare Company, on whose board she also sits. Holland's been on church, school, and

community stages all of her life. She works as a news host and video producer for Aero-News Network. Thank you for supporting local arts.



### **LYDIA PIRILLI** (*Annie Cannon*)

Lydia Pirilli is happy to be back for her fourth show with ICTRep, previously appearing in *Boeing-Boeing*, *Amadeus*, and *Witness for the Prosecution*. You may also recognize her from other theaters around town including Guild Hall Players, Roxy's Downtown, Wichita Community Theatre, Signature Theatre, and the Forum. By day, Lydia is a speech-language pathologist, working with adults on voice and communication. Many thanks to the effervescent

Julie, Stan, Chelsie, cast and crew, Jacob, and YOU for supporting live theater! Special shoutout to Jill and Holland - air hostesses back together again!

## **CREATIVES**



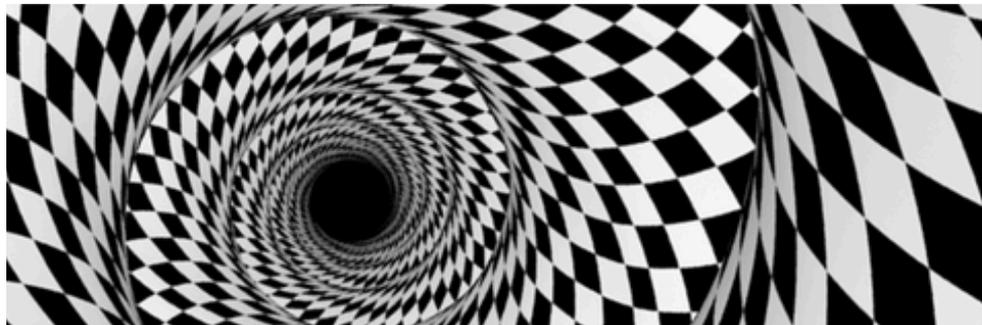
### **LAUREN GUNDERSON** (*Playwright*)

Lauren is one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015 topping the list thrice including 2022-2023. She is a two-time winner of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Arthur L. Weissberger Award, and John Gassner Award for Playwriting. Her

musical adaptation of *The Time Traveller's Wife* premiered on the West End in 2023. *Revolutionary Women*, her new anthology of five plays, was published by Bloomsbury in 2023. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her play *The Catastrophist*, about her husband virologist Nathan Wolfe, premiered digitally in January 2021 and is now in The COVID Art Capsule in the Library of Congress. She co-authored the *Miss Bennet* trilogy with Margot Melcon. *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* premiered Off-Broadway and at Audible.com. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You*; *Exit Pursued by a Bear*; *The Taming*; and *Toil and Trouble*), Dramatists Play Service (*The Revolutionists*; *The Book of Will*; *Silent Sky*; *Bauer*; *Natural Shocks*; *The Wickhams*; *Miss Bennett*; and *Georgiana and Kitty*), and Samuel French (*Emilie*). Her picture book, *Dr Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon* is available from Two Lions/Amazon. She is the bookwriter for musicals with Dave Stewart and Joss Stone (*The Time Traveller's Wife*), Ari Afsar (*Jeannette* and *I and You*), Jorjah Kwamé (*Sinister*), Kira Stone (*Built for This*) and Kait Kerrigan and Bree Lowdermilk (*Justice* and *Earthrise*). She is a board member of The Playwrights Foundation, and a member of the Aspen Institute Science and Society cohort.



Assistive listening for this performance is available through an Auracast™ feed. Look for the “ictrep” feed in your Auracast™ compatible device.



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STUDIOS

STUDIOS



### **KIRK LONGHOFER** (*Sound Design*)

Kirk Longhofer is a theatrical sound designer, producer, and live sound engineer who has been playing with sounds and sound systems since age 12. His theatrical sound designs are heard in educational, community, and professional theaters around the world virtually every week. Favorite recent theatrical work includes *And Then There Were None* (Barn Players), *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (The White Theatre at the J),

*Witness for the Prosecution* and *Amadeus* (ICTRep), and *Carousel* (Newman University). Member Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association. [www.technopraxis.org](http://www.technopraxis.org)



### **CHELSE PENNER** (*Stage Manager*)

Chelsie is excited to be behind the scenes for this beautiful production. Typically, you can find Chelsie on stage, most recently as Constanze Mozart in *Amadeus* earlier this ICTRep season. Other recent performances include *You Can't Take It With You* at Guild Hall Players, *Romeo and Juliet* with Wichita Shakespeare Company, and *Picnic* at Kechi Playhouse. She hopes you feel immersed and welcomed into Miss Leavitt's universe,

and always look to the stars.



### **JORDAN SLUSHER** (*Scenic Projection Design*)

Jordan is a Wichita local scenic and projection designer for performing arts and is thrilled to collaborate on his first production with ICTRep! Recent designs include *Something Rotten!*, *Cats* (Wichita Art Council Award), both the filmed PBS and live Holiday Special at Music Theatre Wichita, *The Consul* with Wichita State University Opera, and *Rusalka* with Wichita Grand Opera. Special thanks to Julie & Stan for the wonderful collaboration with ICTRep!

Special thanks to Credit Union of America for providing complimentary tickets to Wichita Public Schools drama teachers and their students.



*Serving Educators Since 1935*

ICTRep gratefully acknowledges the City of Wichita and the Kansas Arts Commission for general operational support.



# ABOUT THE WOMEN



## Henrietta Swan Leavitt (1868-1921)

Working as a poorly paid member of a team of mostly women who cataloged data for the scientists at Harvard's observatory, Leavitt found a way to look into the great unknown and measure it. Her analytic breakthrough (called the "Period-Luminosity Relation") opened the door to a new kind of interstellar triangulation which became the key to accurately measuring distance in the universe.

Like all American women in 1908, Leavitt was not allowed to earn a PhD nor permitted to use the Great Refractor Telescope, officially because staying outdoors all night in the company of men was considered inappropriate behavior for women. Leavitt suffered from ill health for most of her life, lost most of her hearing in her 20s, and died at age 53 after years of living with stomach cancer. Despite these difficulties, it is on Leavitt's shoulders that modern understanding of astronomy stands.



## Annie Jump Cannon (1863-1941)

Cannon studied physics and astronomy at Wellesley College, graduating as valedictorian in 1884. After teaching physics and becoming an adept photographer, she returned for advanced study at Radcliffe in 1895 under the supervision of Edward Pickering at the Harvard College Observatory.

Cannon worked at the HCO from 1896-1940 where she discovered over 300 stars, catalogued approximately 350,000 spectra, and created an invaluable system for spectral classification; Cannon was only named a Professor of Astronomy in 1938 after 42 years of scientific work. Her work in the field exerted a major influence on the evolution of the science of astronomy from one of mere observation to a field of great theoretical, analytical, and philosophical content. She was a dedicated suffragist and member of the National League of Women Voters.

# OF SILENT SKY



## Williamina Paton Stevens Fleming (1857-1911)

Born in Scotland, Fleming came to the U.S. in 1877. In 1879, having been abandoned by her husband, she found employment as a housekeeper for Edward C. Pickering, director of the Harvard College Observatory. Later that year, Pickering asked Fleming (who went by the name Mina) to work at the Observatory on a temporary basis to help bring order to the process of classification of stellar spectrum photographs. Her work as part of the research staff became permanent in 1881, and she worked for 30 years as a curator of the Draper Collection of astronomical photographs until her death at the age of 54.

## Margaret Leavitt & Peter Shaw

“Margaret Leavitt” is a fictionalized portrait of Henrietta’s three biological sisters, **Mina** who died in childhood, **Martha** Alvira Leavitt Strong, and **Caroline** Reed Leavitt Brown (*pictured right*). A photo of Martha Leavitt, the sister closest to Henrietta in age, could not be located, so we have pictured instead **Martha’s great-granddaughter, the writer and activist Betsy Hodges**; Hodges is also a former mayor of Minneapolis.

Those interested in female composers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are encouraged to listen to the music of **American composer Amy Beach** who lived at the same time as the Leavitt sisters.

**Peter Shaw** is a fictional character. Pictured in the red robe is **Edward C. Pickering**, the longtime director of HCO. According to Dava Sobel’s *The Glass Universe*, Pickering was an open-minded and generous mentor; he was also the son and the husband of influential and outspoken women in the Harvard University circle.



# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Lauren Gunderson, a playwright known for her intelligence and warmth, is one of the most produced living playwrights in America, and her plays have a regular presence in regional playhouses, community theaters and collegiate stages. *SILENT SKY* premiered in 2011 at South Coast Repertory Theater (Costa Mesa, CA) and was inspired by George Johnson's 2006 book *Miss Leavitt's Stars*, which first brought the genius of Henrietta Leavitt to widespread public attention – along with her foundational work in the field of astronomy that Exploration Place's Adam Smith calls “criminally neglected.”

For the record, Leavitt's revolutionary breakthrough has been known as the **“Period-Luminosity Relation”** for over 100 years, with some astronomers only lately referring to it as **Leavitt's Law**. By contrast, the scientific establishment refers to similar fundamental scientific tools eponymously (*Kepler's Law, Hubble's Law, Fermi's golden rule, Lagrange's theorem, the Sérsic profile, the Chandrasekhar limit, etc*). Similarly, the distinguished and foundational system of star classification (OBFGKM) developed in the early 20th century by Annie Jump Cannon is and has always been known as the **Harvard System for Spectral Classification** and never called **The Cannon System**.

I highly recommend reading Dava Sobel's elegant and comprehensive book *The Glass Universe* (2016) which details the work of dozens of women astronomical computers who worked at Harvard Observatory in the years 1875-1925, as well as the 2024 New York Times “Overlooked No More” article about Henrietta Leavitt, because **what we know of the life experiences of these women of science is inspiring and will renew your optimism in the human spirit**.

According to this article, Betsy Hodges, the great-granddaughter of Leavitt's sister, Martha Alvira Strong [whose fictionalized portrait in *Silent Sky* is named Margaret], grew up listening to family stories of Henrietta Leavitt. Hodges – who was the mayor of Minneapolis from 2014 to 2018 and is now a writer on urban issues and racial equity – said her mother and grandmother instilled in her the idea that

Leavitt's achievements were made through ferocious focus and a belief in the importance of one's work. “Achievement for something you love is possible,” Hodges said in an interview. “That's the lesson that I learned from her – she loved what she loved. . . . and she was willing to defy all kinds of expectations to continue to do it and to continue to contribute.

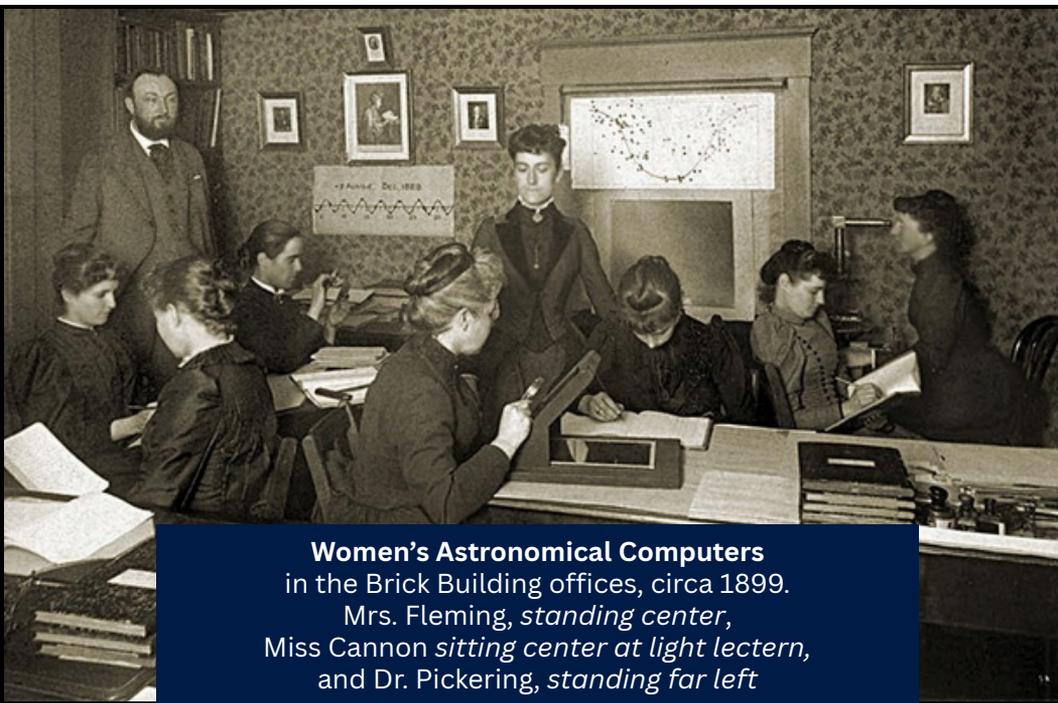


“Overlooked No More: Henrietta Leavitt, Who Unraveled Mysteries of the Stars”  
*New York Times*, March 27, 2024, by Kirk Johnson

*This article is part of the NYTimes' “Overlooked” series, obituaries of remarkable people whose deaths went unreported in their own times.  
Read the full article using the QR code to the left.*



1918. *From left to right: Ida Woods, Evelyn Leland, Florence Cushman, Grace Brooks, Mary Vann, Henrietta Leavitt, Mollie O'Reilly, Mabel Gill, Alta Carpenter, Annie Cannon, Dorothy Block, Arville Walker, telescope operator Frank E. Hinkley and chief of stellar photography Edward King.*



**Women's Astronomical Computers**  
in the Brick Building offices, circa 1899.  
*Mrs. Fleming, standing center,  
Miss Cannon sitting center at light lectern,  
and Dr. Pickering, standing far left*

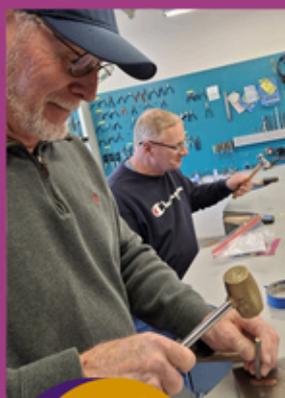


*ABOVE LEFT: Williamina Fleming, circa 1899  
ABOVE RIGHT: Annie Jump Cannon & Henrietta Leavitt, 1912*

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# MANAGEMENT TEAM



## **DR. JULIE LONGHOFER, Artistic Director**

*(Director & Costume Design)*

Julie earned her MA/PhD in dramatic literature & theater history from University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 1995. For almost 40 years, she has served as stage director, costume designer, actor, and dramaturg (literary analyst). Julie has taught hundreds of teenagers and college students how to be stronger theater artists.

In 2023, Julie took on the role of Artistic Director for Wichita Repertory Theater (ICTRep). Her vision is for a regional theater company which (1) finds the best comedies, serious plays and thrillers of literary merit, (2) uses regional talent to produce the highest quality plays in terms of acting and production values, and (3) connects deeply with Wichita audience members from all walks of life.

This is her philosophical approach in all she does:

- Live theater is a love letter from ***The Playwright*** to ***The Actors*** for ***The Audience***.
- Live theater should be a cohesive and thought-provoking experience for its community.
- “*Dramatically Good*” is more than just a tagline for us. Our creative teams are doing their best work while challenging themselves to a new level of artistic excellence so that our audiences are emotionally moved in a memorable way.



## **STAN LONGHOFER, Managing Director**

*(Lighting Design & Technical Direction)*

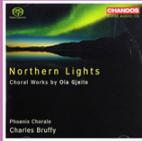
As Managing Director, Stan oversees all of ICTRep’s business operations. He is also the company’s resident technical director and frequent lighting and scenic designer. Recent scenic design work includes *A Jukebox for the Algonquin*, *Witness for the Prosecution* (ICTRep), and *Lend Me a Soprano* (WCT). Favorite past lighting designs include *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Ms. Holmes & Ms. Watson - Apt. 2B*, *Travesties* (ICTRep), *Light Up the Sky* (WCT), and *The Cover of Life* (Guild Hall).

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## SPECIAL THANKS

*Thanks to the entire team at Exploration Place for their hard work and good spirits throughout this project.*

*Crystal Meek and Wichita Community Theater  
Adam Akers  
Chris Glanzer  
Thumper Johnson and Thumper Audio*



*We are also grateful to Norwegian-born composer & pianist **Ola Gjeillo** (YIGH-loo) for graciously allowing us to license “**Dark Night of the Soul**” from his 2012 release Northern Lights for use during the finale of Act 1. His music and artistry inspired us greatly. Check him out!*

## Coming Next at ICTRep

# SWEAT



**Lynn Nottage’s prize-winning 2016 drama is an unforgettable lesson in empathy. Friendships among factory workers are destroyed when layoffs, picket lines & racial tension hit the Rust Belt in the 2000s.**

**March 27 - April 5, 2026**

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*Scan to read our  
year-end report.*

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ICTRep (Wichita Repertory Theater) is a semi-professional company that produces comedies, dramas, and thrillers. Our productions provide challenging roles and design opportunities for young actors and creatives to hone their crafts. In addition, we bring Wichita audiences together to enjoy high-quality, vibrant theatrical experiences that provide more than simply an evening's entertainment. We want our audiences to continue to reflect on and be moved by the plays we produce, long after the "curtain falls."

*ICTRep: Dramatically Good!*

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