

MERCER
THEATRE
PRESENTS

SILENT SKY

BY LAUREN GUNDERSON

DIRECTED BY
SCOT MANN

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY
JENNY GIERING



TATTNALL SQUARE
CENTER FOR THE ARTS
SEP 24-26 | 7:30 PM
SEP 27 | 2:30 PM

Commissioned and first produced by South Coast
Repertory with support from the Elizabeth
George Foundation



MERCER THEATRE PRESENTS

Silent Sky

Directed by Scot Mann

Stage Manager — Danica Dilione

Assistant Stage Managers — Makayla Edothe, Kalea Keller, Laila Sain



CAST

Henrietta Leavitt Karina Nirenberg
Margaret Leavitt Mattie Mcniel
Peter Shaw Rae Carr
Annie Cannon Allie Mahoney
Williamina Fleming Mansi Nair

CREATIVE TEAM

Director Scot Mann
Stage Manager Danica Dilione
Assistant Stage Managers Makayla Edothe, Kalea Keller, Laila Sain
Production Manager..... Frani Rollins
Technical Director Nick Ryan
Scenic Designers Lu Borgia, Nick Ryan
Light Designer Frani Rollins
Assistant Light Designer Caroline Putnam
Sound Designer Samantha Aberdeen
Props Designer Keira Campbell
Costume Designer Shelley Kuhen
Administrative Specialist/Graphic Designer Maha Jolley
Education Coordinator Lani Wilson
Intimacy Coordinator Michelle Ladd Williams
Dialect Coach Carolyn Cook
Technical Consultant Matthew Marone



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CREW

Props Craftspeople Jada Esty, Paul Frayer
Scenic Crew Benjamin Blackwell, Kylie Britton,
..... Dolice Choppala, Marissa Copeland, Cynthia Waters
Electricians Matthew Padua, Natalie Vasquez
Head Run Crew Eli Hill
Run Crew Dolice Choppala, Manisha Parish
Light Board Operator Jordan Coppick
Sound Board Operator Karma Banks
Wardrobe Jay Wheeler
House Manager Megan Bullock

An Introduction from the Astronomical Consultant for *Silent Sky*

I would like to introduce you to three famous female astronomers. These amazing ladies worked at the Harvard observatory in the early 1900's. They were Computers. When we think of computers, the image of electronic computing machines comes to mind. In the time period of the play, a computer was someone who performed computations. Unfortunately, only "the boys" got to play with the telescopes. The job of a computer was tedious to say the least. As Annie describes it: "Record magnitude, position, date, and repeat until you fill up the logbook." To which Williamina responds, "Or go slightly crazy."

Oh yes, the introductions.

Our friends are Annie Cannon, Williamina Fleming and Henrietta Leavitt. Their names may be unfamiliar to you but they changed our entire understanding of the galaxy and our place in the cosmos. As to their astronomical credentials, they all worked for Edward Pickering, the director of the Harvard College Observatory. In 1882 Pickering combined the new technology of photography with the old technology a prism, to capture images of stellar spectra. We are all familiar with the way white light spreads out into a rainbow of colors when passing through a prism. What is not so familiar, is that there are dark lines in that rainbow. The dark bands tell us about the composition of the star and the relative brightness of the colors tell us the temperature.

Armed with a magnifying glass, Annie examined tiny streaks of light on the black and white photographic plates. You will see some of those plates in the performance. She is credited with classifying over 300,000 stars. The early method of classifying stars was rather unorganized. As Williamina describes it in the play: "... the sky was a riot until Miss Cannon coded it." Modifying an earlier system, Annie arranged the stars by their temperature creating the now famous sequence OBAFGKM. O stars are the hottest and M the coolest, which is easy to remember using the mnemonic phrase "Oh, be a fine girl, kiss me."

As for Williamina's credentials, well that is an interesting story in itself. Peter informs us that Pickering was quite angry with "the boys" and stated that: "his housekeeper could do better." Williamina was Pickering's housekeeper. And she did better. Having no formal astronomical training, she is credited with cataloging over 10,000 stars, discovering 59 nebulae and 310 variable stars. Among her discoveries is one of my favorites, the horsehead nebula. As for those variable stars, they became quite an obsession for Henrietta. She called them "blinking stars".

Variable stars were known since the late 1700's and thought to be rare. Henrietta was finding thousands of them in an object known as the small Magellanic Cloud. The Magellanic clouds are glowing nebulous objects that can be seen in the sky below the equator. Harvard had an observatory in Peru and Henrietta was responsible for examining the photographic plates sent up to her. In these clouds of stars, she found a particular class of variable star known as Cepheids. She carefully compared plates taken on different days and determined the time it takes the Cepheids to vary from bright to dim and then back to bright again.

When you look at the sky, how do you know which stars are close to us and which are far away? You might naively think the bright ones are close and the dim ones are far away. If a low power light bulb and a powerful flashlight were the same distance away, you might think the dim light bulb was far away and the flashlight was closer. Henrietta explains this problem to Williamina: "The pulsing isn't random. There is a pattern. The brightest stars take the longest to blink." Henrietta further explains: "A pattern is a standard! And if we have a standard, we can compare stars all over the sky. Right now, if we see two stars that look equally bright, we can't tell which one is the brighter star, and which one is the closer star. But the pulsing can tell us which is which. The pulsing is the answer."

From this simple pattern and a bit of mathematics, other astronomers begin to measure the distance to stars and galaxies. Listen for their names in the dialog: "Hertzprung-The Danish one? Big Beard." As Peter proclaims: "This could be the first measurement of anything outside of our galaxy." Another fellow, who now has a telescope named after him, "Hudgins. Hubble?", also makes measurements using Henrietta's discovery. He finds that the Andromeda Nebula, as it was called, is outside our own Milky Way. It turns out to be another galaxy some 2.5 million light years away. Suddenly, the universe is far greater than anyone could have imagined.

Next time you look up at the sky at night, marveling at the wonders of creation, don't forget the ladies who measured those little points of light.

Matt Marone, Astronomical Consultant for *Silent Sky*

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Professional show photos will be available online. Please reach out to Mercer Theatre if interested.

CAST



Rae Carr (Peter Shaw) is a sophomore pre-nursing major at Mercer University who is excited to be a part of this production. Rae is looking forward to participating in future Mercer Theatre productions and would like to thank everyone for their amazing work.



Allie Mahoney (Annie Cannon) is a sophomore biology major, and psychology and theatre double minor at Mercer University. She has enjoyed her time working on this production and looks forward to being involved in other Mercer Theatre productions. Allie would like to thank her wonderful cast and crew for all of their hard work.



Mattie McNiell (Margaret Leavitt) is a freshman majoring in elementary education. In the past she has done many shows but is excited to start her journey with Mercer Theatre! She is so grateful for her mom, her biggest supporter. Enjoy “Silent Sky!”



Mansi Nair (Williamina Fleming) is a sophomore biology major and theatre minor at Mercer University. This is her first Mercer Theatre production, but has previously worked on various theatre productions at her high school such as Myrtle in “The Great Gatsby” and Violet in “It’s a Wonderful Life.” She would like to thank her cast and crew, and family and friends for all their support! Enjoy the show!!



Karina Nirenberg (Henrietta Leavitt) is a sophomore psychology major with minors in theatre and biology. Last year, she did sound design for “Gideon’s Knot,” performed in “Dragons Dream Circanium,” and was Carol in “When My Body Cried Out.” She’s so excited to be back for another great semester of theatre!

CREW



Samantha Aberdeen (Sound Designer) is a sophomore Africana studies, and women and gender studies double major at Mercer University. She is excited to work on this production and see everyone's hard work. She would like to thank everyone for all the effort they put in!



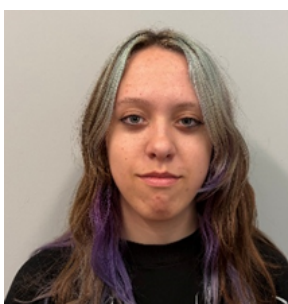
Karma Banks (Sound Board Operator) is a sophomore mechanical engineering major at Mercer University. This will be her first involvement in the Mercer Players and in theatre production. She can't wait to be a part of the show and to learn a lot! She would like to thank her family for their support and her peers for their patient teaching.



Benjamin Blackwell (Scenic Crew) is a freshman at Mercer working on his first show with Mercer Players. In this production, he has helped the scenic crew bring the set together by assisting in the construction of the set.



Lu Borgia (Scenic Designer) is a junior theatre and art double major at Mercer University. They are excited to show off their first scenic design, and want to thank all the cast and crew for their hard work. They hope you enjoy the show!



Kylie Britton (Scenic Crew) is a freshman mechanical engineering major at Mercer University. This is their first time being a part of their first show at Mercer. They have enjoyed working on this show and look forward to future productions with Mercer Theatre.



Megan Bullock (House Manager) is a junior English and classical studies double major at Mercer. This is her 9th show with Mercer theatre. She hopes you enjoy the show!



Keira Campbell (Props Designer) is a sophomore mechanical engineering major at Mercer University. This is her second play with Mercer Theatre after working on “Grande Guignol” last year. She is very excited to see this play come to life and would like to thank all the cast, crew, and professors that have worked so hard to make it possible.



Dolice Choppala (Run Crew and Scenic Crew) is a freshman on the pre-med track. She is excited for every artistic challenge and hopes that everyone will enjoy “Silent Sky!”



Marissa Copeland (Scenic Crew) is a junior biochemistry major and Spanish minor. She has acted in Mercer Theatre’s “The Colored Museum” and participated in last year’s Cabaret, but this is Marissa's first show as a crew member. She is so glad that Mercer Theatre has given her the opportunity to finally be in theatre and experience everything it entails.



Jordan Coppick (light board operator) is a sophomore elementary education major. He is so excited to be a part of the show and do something new ! He would like to thank the stage management and production team for all their hard work on the show.



Danica Dilione (Stage Manager) is a theatre and media studies double major. She has been involved in theatre ever since she was a little kid and has found a love for stage managing! She has loved this opportunity and thanks her ASMs, Laila, Makayla, and Kalea, for all their help and support throughout this time. She would also like to thank all the cast and crew for helping make “Silent Sky” happen and hopes you enjoy the show!



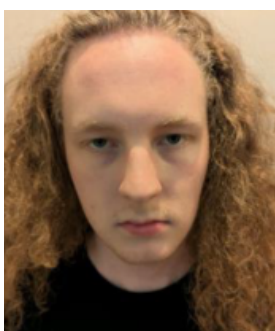
Makayla Edohe (Assistant Stage Manager) is a first year from Abuja, Nigeria studying civil engineering at Mercer. She would love to thank Mercer Players, her family, and friends, for supporting her in this beautiful show. She says it has been amazing working for Silent Sky, she can't wait for more shows!



Jada Esty (Props Craftsperson) is a freshman secondary history education major at Mercer University. She has enjoyed working on this play and looks forward to future productions with Mercer Theatre. She has been involved in theatre for three years and hopes to continue her involvement through university. Jada would like to thank her family, her friends, and other Mercer Players for their support.



Paul Frayer (Prop Craftsperson) is a sophomore media studies and creative writing major. This is his second year working with Mercer Theatre. He is excited to see the play in action.



Eli Hill (Head Run Crew) would like to thank the stage management team for making everything run smoothly and keeping the show afloat. They would also like to thank the production team for the countless hours put into designing and coordinating the show. Eli hopes you enjoy the show.



Maha Jolley is the Administrative Support Assistant for Theatre, Communications, Debate, Sociology, and Political Science. She has a BA in English Literature and has worked for Mercer Since January of 2026. Maha is excited and honored to help support the theatre department.



Kalea Keller (Assistant Stage Manager) is a freshman biology major at Mercer University. This is their very first Mercer Theatre production and their first time as an ASM. They are excited to be a part of this show and hope you enjoy both the efforts of the cast and crew.



Shelley Kuhen (Costume Director) This is Shelley's 30th season as Costume Director for Mercer Theatre. Her designs were last seen in Mercer Theatre's "Dragon's Dream Circanium" and "Grand Guignol". They were also seen in Mercer Opera's "9 to 5: The Musical". In addition, she designs for Theatre Macon and her most current productions were "Angels in America: Perestroika" and "Grease". She wants to thank her family for their love and understanding (as they've supported her through many crazy endeavors). She also wants to give a shout out to her costume shop crew for their countless hours of hard work and for their encouragement, love and laughter.



Scot Mann (Director) is a professor of Acting and Directing in the Mercer Theatre Program and a Fight Master with the Society of American Fight Directors. He would like to thank the actors for their dedication and commitment to this project and the entire Mercer Theatre family for their support on this project.



Matthew Padua (Electrician) is a senior majoring in information, science, and technology with a minor in cybersecurity at Mercer University. This will be his first Mercer Theatre production. He is very excited to work behind the scenes and make the production come to life. He would like to thank Professor Rollins for giving him the opportunity to work with such amazing people.



Manisha Parish (Run Crew) is a freshman and psychology major at Mercer University. She has never worked in theatre before but wants to become more involved. She is very excited to be in this production for Mercer Players. She would like to thank her friends and family for supporting her!



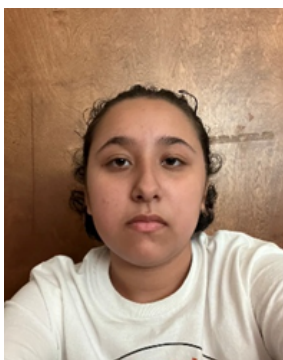
Frani Rollins (Lighting Designer) is the Program Director for Mercer Theatre and an Associate Professor of Design and Technology with the Mercer University Theatre Department. She would like to thank the Mercer Players, the Mercer Theatre Program, and her family for being awesome, supportive, and inspiring people.



Nick Ryan (Scenic Designer/Technical Director) holds a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre: Technical Production from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and received his Bachelor of Arts in Dramatic Arts- Design & Technology from Georgia Southwestern State University. Nick has also had the pleasure of working professionally for Georgia Stage, a theatrical rigging & drape company.



Laila Sain (Assistant Stage Manager) is a sophomore theatre major and education minor at Mercer University. She has enjoyed all the hard work everyone's put into this production and is excited to be a part of it! She would like to thank the crew and cast for making this show possible.



Natalie Vasquez (Electrician) is a freshman electrical engineer major at Mercer University. She's happy to have supported the production of this play and would like to give thanks to all the cast and crew for bringing this production to life.



Cynthia Waters (Scenic Crew) is a freshman history major at Mercer University. This is her first time working on a theatre production, and she looks forward to working more with the Mercer Players in the future. Cynthia wants to thank the cast and crew for their hard work, and her family and friends for supporting her.



Jay Wheeler (Wardrobe) is a freshman biomedical engineering major at Mercer University. He helped with many productions in his high school and is looking forward to doing the same with Mercer Players! He would like to thank everyone in Mercer Players for being very welcoming and supportive

Astronomical Consultant



Matt Marone is a Mercer University faculty member with a passion for astronomy. He has a Ph.D. in physics, and has appeared on local news stations to share information on astrological phenomena. Matt gladly gave his time to help the Mercer Theatre better understand the history and astronomy portrayed in *Silent Sky*.

Author



Lauren Gunderson is one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015, topping the list thrice, including 2022/23. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theatre Award, the Lanford Wilson Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, and was a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Arthur L. Weissberger Award and John Gassner Award for Playwriting.

WOMEN WHO CHANGED THE STARS

In a male dominated field, Henrietta Leavitt, Williamina Fleming, and Annie Jump Cannon helped transform the world's understanding of the universe. They were hired to measure and catalog stars at Harvard College Observatory, but true impact came when they pushed the limit passed what their job required of them.



Williamina Fleming immigrated to Boston from Scotland with her husband and unborn child, only to be abandoned and left to support herself as a housemaid. Yet, she never gave up on her dream of studying the stars. At Harvard, she helped develop a system for designating stars by their hydrogen content, discovered the Horsehead Nebula and became the first woman to be appointed Curator of Astronomical Photographs.



Henrietta Leavitt always had a sense of wonder about what could be beyond our sky. Through her work at Harvard, she discovered a period-luminosity relationship in Cepheid variable stars. This created a way and standard to measure vast distances across space, helping future astronomers to recognize that galaxies existed outside of the Milky Way.



Annie Jump Cannon suffered severe hearing loss at a young age but never let that affect her studies. Known as the "census taker of the sky", she logged over 350,000 stars and she refined Fleming's system and classified stars based on their surface temperature. This system is still used and studied today, known as Harvard Spectral Classification System.



These women stayed curious, took risks, and made their mark! Now it's your turn. How will you change the world as we know it.

During intermission or after the show, go to the lobby and make your mark on the universe. Further instructions on how to participate are on the table out there.



Special Thanks:

The Middle Georgia Astronomical Society



And:

Merpo, Mercer Physical Plant, and Mercer Administration

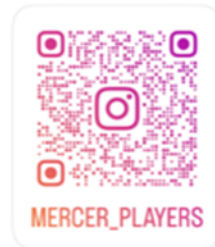
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AND Mercer Players Student group on facebook at:



The Official Mercer Players Group



TATTNALL SQUARE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The historic church that has stood sentry for more than 100 years at the corner of Macon's College and Oglethorpe Streets, has experienced a renaissance to become Tattnall Square Center for the Arts.

The Center serves as a community theatre and arts venue, as well as home to the University's Theatre Department. Pews, carpet, and remnants of a 1960s remodel have been removed to make way for a new multi-purpose arts space. Sunday School classrooms have been transformed into teaching studios, a scenic shop with a two-story loft, costume shop and storage, and faculty offices. The Center accommodates visual and performing arts, lectures, film screenings, and workshops hosted by community arts organizations.

The Tattnall Square Center is the first effort in our arts-rich community to create a space where performing arts, visual arts, education and film could all be presented in one space.

