

‘Silent Sky’ creates sonic boom on SU stage

What do you do when you are the most brilliant person in the room and are seen, but not heard? This drama offers an imagined glimpse into the life of Henrietta Leavitt, an eager young Radcliffe graduate who came from her home in the Midwest to the Harvard College Observatory to work as one of a "harem" (yes, that's what they called it) of "computers" — women hired to catalog the brightness of stars in photographic plates from the observatory's state-of-the-art telescope. Their discoveries revolutionized astronomy in the early 20th century and paved the way for modern astronomy's mapping of the universe.

Written by Laura Gunderson, the play debuted in 2011 and is directed by Southwestern University's Kathleen Juhl. *Silent Sky* is among the most exciting new plays I've seen in a long time. It is intellectually stimulating, emotionally moving, and with enough comic relief to make a heavy subject palatable — and I liked it!

Miss Leavitt longs to be recognized, but she's in a man's world and is challenged to bring her theory of Cepheid Variables to light. But she must balance her passion for astronomy while being pulled by her family, science, faith and romance. This is the incredible true story of Harvard's "brightest star," Henrietta Leavitt (played by a spunky and determined Joan Milburn), who discovered in 1912 that one could relate a star's brightness cycle to its absolute magnitude. Personally, I don't understand all the details, but this was a valuable stepping stone later for other scientists to be able to measure the distance of stars, star clusters and galaxies.

Miss Leavitt's work changed age-old theories that our Milky Way existed by itself and enlightened us that we are not alone, but one of many, many galaxies out there. Now that I understand.

Like most of us, not knowing anything about Henrietta



PETE'S PICKS

Peter Dossing

Silent Sky



Red Poppy Rating: 5 out of 5

Leavitt and her accomplishments, I figured I'd be in for a history lesson of sorts. During this time in the field of astronomy, it was a "man's world." Women who worked in the Harvard College of Astronomy were not even allowed to look through the college's long-distance telescope and were not given credit for any of their hard work and findings — their male counterparts took all the credit for themselves.

Back home, her married sister Margaret, played by a radiant Cassidy Mayfield, adds a look at domestic life and a telling glimpse of how much Leavitt's work challenged contemporary religious views, forever displacing the Earth from the center of the universe.

Christian Erben and Alejandra Reyes Salina play fellow "computers" Williamina Fleming and Annie Cannon, both of whom had made key contributions to cataloging stars by the time Leavitt arrived. They embody not only the degree to which women were kept in subsidiary, unrecognized roles in the sciences — but also the rising tide of the women's suffrage movement.

Chris Szeto-Joe's earnestly insensitive and gently awkward Peter Shaw character

adaptably serves as both the sole representative of clueless male privilege and as Leavitt's passing love interest. Mr. Szeto-Joe shared with me, saying, "I really like this drama, the fact that it blends science with theater. Not something you see every day — the story is so powerful."

Ms. Milburn, who plays Miss Leavitt, is excited to play the part.

"I am incredibly grateful to be able to play such a strong woman like Henrietta Leavitt. When I was first chosen, I had no idea who she was or who any of the other women were. The fact that they are so important, I was just shocked as I had never heard of them before and her work still lives on today."

The Sarofim School of Fine Arts opens the 2018-2019 season shedding light on the true story of a forgotten female astronomer who taught us how to "measure the universe." *Silent Sky* finishes its two-week run the weekend of October 12-14 at Southwestern University's Jesse H. and Mary Gibbs Jones Theater; 7:30 p.m., Friday and Saturday, matinee at 3 p.m. Sunday. Ticket prices range from \$12-18. Call 512-863-1378 for tickets. Run time is under two-hours including intermission. Not rated.

Special Note: Weather permitting, the Williamson County Astronomy Club will be on hand for telescope viewing just outside the theater for Friday and Saturday performances and at 2:00 p.m. before Sunday's performance. Physics professor and Fountainwood Observatory Director Dr. Mark Bottorff will present a lecture titled "A Heartbeat in the Heavens: Henrietta Leavitt's Grand Discovery." I'm sure that Dr. Bottorff's presentation will be easily understood by all, including me — I'm looking forward to it!

Peter Dossing is a recovering stand-up comedian who was captivated by the theater at a very early age. He especially enjoys community theater productions. He can be reached at pdossing@gmail.com.



Debbie Alexander of Salado, Kacey Pond of Georgetown and Jimmy Duvall of Liberty Hill have fun at the festival.

Crowds brave the rain for wine

Continued from 1B

said.

"And we love downtown Georgetown," Mr. Stowell added.

"It reminds us of home," Ms. Stowell said. The couple hail from Fairhope, Alabama. "It's very quaint, just like Georgetown."

When asked what they're enjoying about the festival, Mr. Stowell said, "Not the weather."

The two said they're enjoying the people and smells of wine.

"Even though the weather is not cooperative, people are laughing and having a good time," Ms. Stowell said.



Lindsey Hooze of Round Rock enjoys some wine.

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Solutions on Page 7B

"With my voice I cry to the Lord;
With my voice I make supplication to the Lord.
I pour out my complaint before him;
When my spirit is faint,
You know my way.
In the path where I walk, they have hidden a trap for me...
I cry to you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my refuge,
My portion in the land of the living.'"

- PSALMS 142:1-3, 5 (NRSV)

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