**Silent Sky Director’s Note**

*As Henrietta Leavitt stared at the stars and struggled to chart our place in the universe, she charted a new path for women at the turn of the 20th century.*

Have you ever heard of Henrietta Leavitt? Neither had I until I read Lauren Gunderson’s ***Silent Sky***. I love when theatre brings to life stories the history books don't tell.

This early 20th Century female astronomer's discoveries gave us the ability to measure the universe. The much more famous (and male) astronomer Edwin Hubble built on her work and won the Nobel Prize for his work, which Henrietta could not because she died young before the full effects of her work were seen.

Playwright Lauren Gunderson, a woman who was recognized as the most-produced living playwright by American Theatre magazine in 2016, didn’t know who was Henrietta Leavitt was either until she happened upon her story by chance.

“I’ve always been drawn to tell stories of science. My earliest plays were about Isaac Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci as young men. But then I saw the inherent drama of women in science, who have it twice as hard (which means twice the drama). I found Henrietta’s story by chance while perusing the stalls of used books in New York. There isn’t that much known of her, but what is known is that in 1912 this unassuming but meticulous and curious woman gave the flagging field of astronomy the ingredient it needed to leap into the future. Without her finding a pattern in Cepheid stars, great astronomers like Shapley and Hubble wouldn’t have shown us how huge and fast-moving our universe is. I went to Cambridge to visit Henrietta before the premiere of the play in 2011 and got to see her handwritten notes, the glass photographic plates she used, and her grave,” said Gunderson.

She continued, “This is going to sound crazy, but I stood there at her grave and said, “Thank you for letting me borrow your story. I promise I’ll take care of it.”

Theatre lovers are fortunate that Gunderson found inspiration in Leavitt’s scientific discoveries, while persevering in a man’s world, and borrowed her story to craft a marvelous play.

It is gratifying to work on a play with so many lovely elements – beautiful language, history, science, strong women characters, romance, and humor. Bringing to light historically significant and under-recognized women is an enjoyable process. I am very inspired by women who overcame all sorts of obstacles to make a place in their field or in the world. What makes me passionate about this, presenting ***Silent Sky***, is that some of those women are being given the credit they always deserved.

*Francine*