

Merely Players  
Presents  
SILENT SKY

By Lauren Gunderson

Directed by  
**Mandy Irons+**

Tech Director/Scenic, Light Designer  
**Charles Ford+**

*Center these within themselves*

Costume Designers

**Megan Sander**

**Kathleen McGee**

Stage Manager

**Samantha Duncan+**

February 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 22, 2026

at

Merely Underground in Durango, Colorado

Thanks to:

Community Foundation Serving Southwest Colorado, Psyche Digital, Ballantine Family Fund

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# *Silent Sky*

## CAST

Henrietta Leavitt	Tara Demmy+
Margaret Leavitt	Abby Kubicek+
Peter Shaw	Geoff Johnson+
Annie Cannon	Jeannie B. Wheeldon+
Williamina Fleming	Maureen May+

**Time:** 1900 - 1920

**Settings:** Starfield, The Leavitt Home in Wisconsin, The Brick Building at Harvard Observatory, An Ocean Liner on the Atlantic, Henrietta's home in Cambridge, MA

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Wardrobe Lead	Mary Lynn Clark+
Light Technician	Margy Dudley+
Sound Technician	Jeff Widen+
Props Lead/Box Office Manager	Diane Panelli+
Projection Operator/Props Asst.	Melanie McKinney-Gonzales
Ticket Manager	Greta Richter +
Production Coordinator	Mona Wood-Patterson+
Photographer	Kara Cavalca+
Lead Carpenters	Charles Ford+ Mark Russell+
Technical Assistant	Jenny Mason+
Painting Lead	Mohriah James+
Merely Players Intern	Sofia Voss
Poster Design	Kate Ishay+
Scottish Dialect Consultants	Lyndsay Taylor Ryan Taylor

## **Set/Props Construction/Scenic Painting**

Matt Bodo+  
Randy Hertzman+  
Melanie McKinney-Gonzales  
Grace Morledge+  
Phil Barnett  
Max Fischer  
Sofia Voss  
Jeannie Wheeldon+  
Margy Dudley+  
Lori Fisher+  
Melissa Mossinghoff+  
Jeff Widen+  
Melanie McLean+  
Daphne Tingey+

+ Merely Players Artistic Company

**There is a fifteen-minute intermission between acts. Concessions from Gabe's Goodies will be on sale before the show and during intermission.**

We invite to explore our Henrietta Leavitt Informational Display, designed by Sofia Voss, in the lobby area.

*Please silence your cell phones; they don't work that well down here anyway.*

The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited. We know that, for many of you, taking performance photos or video of your loved ones is a huge temptation. Please respect this rule of theatre etiquette and resist! Phone use during a show is distracting to actors and audience members and is disrespectful of our creative property. Live theatre is meant to be temporal – let it be just that. Thank you!

*That said, we welcome you to take photos/video in the theatre before and after, **but not during**, the performance. If you post photos of the stage, please be sure to credit and tag Merely Players. @merely\_players\_durango*

## **WHO'S WHO**

**Tara Demmy** (*Henrietta Leavitt*) is a comedian, theatre artist, and historian from Philadelphia. Merely credits include: *Hamlet* (Mask Director), *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* (Nellie), and *Small Mouth Sounds* (Alicia). She has performed in comedy festivals all over the country and co-created five shows with the award-winning physical theatre company, Tribe of Fools. Her original show, *Clown Sex Ed*, is on tour this spring. Tara works for a nonprofit providing free theatre/arts classes to veterans and their families. Lots of love to her Mom, Dad, twin Bro, co-clown Zach, darling Conor, and the brilliant SS Team! tarademmy.com.

**Mary Lynn Clark** (*Wardrobe Lead*) is delighted to be working once again with stellar Costume Designers Megan Sander and Kathleen McGee. Helping these two designers create their cosmic vision is simply out of this universe! Mary Lynn's all-time favorite

job is being the mom to three superstar children – Laura, Ellie and Gabe, and being the wife to my supportive husband, Matt, who loves me to the moon and back.

**Margy Dudley** (*Light Technician*) is excited and honored to be working on her second Merely Players production. She first joined the live theatre scene as Assistant Stage Manager for *Hamlet* this past fall and is grateful for the opportunities provided by Mona and Charles to be a part of this theatrical family. She loves learning new skills especially later in life. She believes in jumping in - you never know unless you try. Margy is passionate about supporting the creative community in Durango and when she is not at Merely Underground, she hosts the podcast *Four Corners Arts Forum with Margy Dudley* highlighting the stories of the many talented and creative people in our region. Durango may be a small town, but the art scene is huge!

**Samantha Duncan** (*Stage Manager*) is a Durango native and found her passion for tech theatre during her first production with Merely Players 14 years ago. She made her debut as stage manager for Merely Player's *Baskerville* in 2017, with her highlights being *Mamma Mia!* and *Hands on a Hardbody*. When she is not busily writing blocking notes or arranging scene changes, she spends her time playing Dungeons & Dragons with her friends and working on her creative writing. Samantha is thrilled to be a part of *Silent Sky* and will be returning to stage manage for Merely Players' next production, *Into the Woods*.

**Charles Ford** (*Tech Director/Scenic Designer*) is a master backstage technician and the Technical Director of Merely Players. An avid puppeteer, mask-maker, make-up artist, robotics engineer, and special effects designer, he has designed dozens of sets for a variety of theatrical genres. In addition, he typically designs the lighting, sound, props, and the special effects. Charles is the recipient of several awards, including the Durango Foundation of Educational Excellence's Outstanding Teacher Award, the Rocky Mountain Theatre Association Technical Theatre Award, and numerous Broadway World Denver awards for scenic and lighting designs.

**Lauren Gunderson** (*Author*) is one of the most produced playwrights in the United States. Her work is known for its intelligence, wit, and deep curiosity about science, history, and the women whose stories have too often gone untold. Gunderson's plays frequently explore the intersection of discovery and humanity, blending rigorous research with emotional warmth and humor. She holds degrees from New York University and Juilliard. Merely Players has produced two other of her plays: *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* and *The Book of Will*.

**Mandy Irons** (*Director*) is so grateful to have been given the opportunity to direct this beautiful show, especially after having the sweetest time directing last year's reading of *Tiny Beautiful Things*. Other favorite directing credits include *True West* (DAC) and *Eleemosynary* (W&L University Theatre), not to mention a few Snowdown Follies. She was recently honored with a Broadway World Award as Best Performer in a Musical for her performance as Miss Adelaide in last spring's Merely production of *Guys and Dolls*. Mandy is a minister at Christ the King Lutheran Church and sings with the Durango Women's Choir. She would like to thank this cast, crew, and creatives for their constant kindness and trust, and, of course, the inimitable Brian Geisinger for his love and support.

**Geoff Johnson** (*Peter Shaw*) is starstruck to join this out-of-this-world cast. Recent credits include Laertes/Guildenstern in *Hamlet*, Nicely Nicely Johnson in *Guys and Dolls* and the one man show: *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*. Geoff has spent years looking up at the stars and can correctly identify numerous celestial objects including earth's moon! In his spare time, Geoff enjoys playing with Juniper the puppy and washing off the dog slobber before spending time with his spectacular, spellbinding spouse, Mohriah James.

**Abby Kubicek** (*Margaret Leavitt*) is honored to be a part of this brilliant and beautiful production. Recent stage credits include *It's a Wonderful Life* (Zuzu, Peter, and Others – Merely Players), *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* (Vern – DAC), *Collective Rage: A Play in Five Betties* (Betty #1 – Unsought Theatre), *I Hate Hamlet* (Deirdre – DAC), and *Murder on the Orient Express* (Mary – Merely Players). Outside of the theatre, Abby is a licensed sex and relationship therapist. She enjoys singing, reading, and spending time in nature. Abby dedicates this performance to the many amazing, strong women in her life.

**Maureen May** (*Williamina Fleming*) has been involved with live theater in Durango since the late 1980s. Some favorite past roles with Merely Players are Rose in *The Children*, Ruth in *Collected Stories*, Polly in *Other Desert Cities*, Rose in *Neglect*, Sister Aloysius in *Doubt*, Hertha in *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*, and The Teacher in *Small Mouth Sounds*. She is also a visual artist, and her work can be viewed at [maureenmayart.com](http://maureenmayart.com). Maureen is honored to be working with Mandy and the amazing cast and crew of *Silent Sky*.

**Kathleen McGee** (*Costume Designer*) is currently the Head Draper in the Theatre Department at Fort Lewis College and has worked on over thirteen productions there. She teaches and constructs the more complicated works of art worn by the actors. Before moving to Durango, she taught garment construction and was on the board at Jacqui Burke's Fashion School, was Wardrobe Supervisor at the Dunbar Lyric Group, and was an apprentice Kiltmaker, all in Scotland. Kathleen was excited to costume *Hamlet* in October and is thrilled to be a part of the Merely Players team.

**Melanie McKinney-Gonzales** (*Props Assistant*) realized early that she loved the magic of live theater, both on stage and behind it. Past roles include melodrama heroine, Alice in *You Can't Take It with You*, and the Japanese shadow play *Zeami*. After a long intermission devoted to raising children—complete with daily productions of another kind—Melanie is delighted to return to the theatre, and thanks her family and friends for their support.

**Diane Panelli** (*Props Lead/Box Office Manager*) co-founded a theatre production company at Sarah Lawrence College, then went on to attending a cooking school in NYC and owning a restaurant in Telluride before moving to Durango in 2004. She serves on the Merely Players board and truly loves the hunt for all the props that make a show special.

**Megan Sander** (*Costume Designer*) is a Costume Designer for Film and Stage. Since 1998, she's designed for the Rose Parade, various film projects, commercials, and stage productions, including *5 Lesbians* and *Edwin Drood* at the Durango Arts Center, teaching and designing at Fort Lewis College (fav credits: *Anais*, *Nevermore*, *The Great Comet*),

and costume design for *Hamlet* at Merely Players. She is excited to return to Merely Players for *Silent Sky*.

**Jeannie B. Wheeldon** (*Annie Jump Cannon*) is honored to portray a spunky woman defined by precision, a pioneering spirit, and a passion for women's rights. A former Durango theater owner/ director as well as CFO for Intelligent Investment Management, Jeannie's recent Merely Players acting credits include *The Humans*, *The Children*, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and *Hands on a Hardbody*. She finds a natural kinship with Annie—the “commander” of the Harvard computers—and is delighted to be surrounded by such a talented group of women (and one guy!). Whether classifying stars or market data, she thrives in the “terse and sure” details. Jeannie dedicates this performance to her late husband, Steve. He remains her brightest north star and her constant “fine and distant comfort” among the heavens.

**Jeff Widen** (*Sound Technician*) a Durango local, has worked in set construction and theatre tech in Durango theaters for the last decade, including Durango High School, Merely Players, Durango Arts Center, and Fort Lewis College. Some of his favorite works include *Cabaret*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Guys and Dolls*. He is excited to working with the cast and crew of *Silent Sky* and hopes everyone will enjoy the show.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We offer our sincere gratitude to those who donated items or helped us with this show. Many hands and kind hearts help us to do our work:

Christ the King Lutheran Church Choir  
Community Foundation Serving SW Colorado  
The Durango Herald  
Fort Lewis College Theatre  
Margy Dudley/4 Corners Arts Forum/ KDUR  
Maureen May  
Kathy and Mike Switzer

Heartfelt gratitude to **Trisha & Hank Hayes** and **Lois Bartig & Ed Small** for the generous gift of our brand new, wonderfully comfortable chairs. Your kindness supports every artist and audience member. Our entire community thanks you!

#### SUPPORTERS/DONORS WHO HELP MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE

Mere words cannot describe how honoured we are by your support. We encourage our audience members to solicit these businesses and to tell the individuals that they are grand!

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Donna Albright  
Luann Andrew  
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Katy Baker

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Seth Furtney  
Nancy Galbraith  
Mandy Irons  
Aleksandra Gajdeczka  
Lynn Gallati

Marlene Gebhardt  
Ronald Goetzinger  
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Jennifer Goodwin  
Charlie and Daisy Grice  
Shawn Grimes  
George Gross  
Marian Hamlen  
Tami Hanson  
Jessica Jane and Jacob Harris  
Satoko Harris  
Jeni Hartmann  
Kurt and Diane Hillman  
Wendy Hillmer  
Susan Hillmeyer  
Judy Hook  
Roy and Suzy Horvath  
Elizabeth Howe  
Amy Huddleston  
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George Johnson  
Stephen Johnson  
Matt Klausmeier  
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**MERELY PLAYERS** began work in 1994, was officially founded in 1997, and has been bringing theatre to our community ever since. Our vision is to consistently provide quality theatre in this region, while broadening the range of types of experiences available to local theatergoers through relevant, exciting productions. Merely Players is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, and we assure you that any money donated will go toward making quality theatre in Durango both now and in the future.

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*A Musical Journey*

**Into the Woods**

April/May 2026

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Telephone: 970.749.8585

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Thank you for spending your time with us. We would love to know what you thought about the play. Drop us an email at [merelydirectors@gmail.com](mailto:merelydirectors@gmail.com) or share with us on Facebook at Merely Players – Durango.

*“In our troubled days, it is good to have something outside our planet, something fine and distant for comfort.” - Annie Jump Cannon*

## **SOME NOTES ABOUT THE PLAY AND ITS MUSIC:**

*Silent Sky* tells the true story of astronomer Henrietta Leavitt and her female colleagues (Annie Cannon and Williamina Fleming) at the Harvard College Observatory in the early 1900s. Called *Leavitt's Law*, Henrietta's groundbreaking discovery is the relationship between the luminosity and period of Cepheid variable stars, which only then allowed astronomers to measure cosmic distances - placing our planet within the Milky Way and the Milky Way within the universe. You can discover more about Henrietta Leavitt in our installation, designed by our intern, Sofia Voss, near the front door

The hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" is a well-known hymn. The notes Margaret plays at the end of Act One are the prime row notes from Arnold Schoenberg's "Variations for Orchestra Opus 31," his first twelve-tone composition for a large ensemble, which plays also at the end of the act. Twelve-tone composing is often more mathematical than musical, and it seemed the perfect music to aid Henrietta in her discovery. The music during Henrietta's final monologue is a combination of sections of the first movement of "Gustav Mahler's Symphony No.1," which just so happens to have the same tonality as the stars as heard by telescopes like the Kepler Space Telescope, using a technique called asteroseismology.

## **A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR:**

When offered the opportunity to direct this production of *Silent Sky*, I leapt at it. What's not to love in a story about a little-known female astronomer whose discovery allowed other astronomers, like Hubble, to pinpoint where Earth is in the vastness of space? I can't tell you how much this story resonates with me, especially at this time in my life when I often feel at sea, searching for a safe harbor, wondering what life is all about, what the afterlife is all about, and what my responsibilities are to those who live on after I cease to be. Oh, I know I'll do nothing as grand and sweeping as Henrietta, but that's not

the point. In my head and heart, where science and faith happily co-exist, I pray that we are none of us stuck or contained; that we lean into our connectedness with everyone and everything; that we remain curious about the worlds we can and cannot see; that we always and forever search for truth for the betterment of all. “Because,” as Henrietta explains, “the real point is seeing something bigger. And knowing we’re a small part of it, if we’re lucky. In the end, that is a life well-lived.”

Mandy Irons