

COMMONWEAL THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS



THE HALF - LIFE OF MARIE CURIE

by Lauren Gunderson

An ode to friendship
April 5–July 5

PROFESSIONAL LIVE THEATRE

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, at the **Commonweal Theatre**, acknowledge that we work and gather on the ancestral lands of the Dakota Nation and other Indigenous peoples. We recognize these Nations as the original caretakers of this land and acknowledge the injustices committed against them. We strive to promote healing and inclusion through storytelling, which is fundamental to our mission.

As artists in our community we have a responsibility to create a welcoming, inclusive, and nurturing environment where visitors and community members can gather and explore big ideas through live theatre. Fostering such an environment begins with education and reflection. Our Land Acknowledgement is just one way the Commonweal exercises our commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Thank you to the Minnesota Historical Society, Lanesboro Historical Society, Prairie Island Indian Community, Mississippi Valley Archeology Center, and Mower County Historical Society for assisting in the research that led to the formation of our Land Acknowledgement.



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VICTORIA SCATTERGOOD • WWW.VSCATTERGOOD.COM

Metis artist Victoria Scattergood is inspired by historical ledger drawings which were popular across the northern and southern plains of Canada and the US. She puts a unique perspective on it, using actual historical ledger prints from the late 1800s with beautiful, hand drawn animals.

WELCOME TO THE COMMONWEAL!

We are delighted to welcome you to the first production of our 37th Season:
The Half-Life of Marie Curie by Lauren Gunderson!

It's no secret that we love Lauren Gunderson's plays. We first produced her work in 2018 with the marvelous *Silent Sky* and last year's holiday charmer *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (co-written with Margot Melcon). Gunderson is skilled at illuminating history and science and the innovative, pioneering women who make it happen. These explorations are passionate and spirited, as enriching as they are entertaining.

In the play, we see Marie Curie at the top of her field—on her way to receiving an unprecedented second Nobel Prize—and on the verge of throwing it all away. That is, until a dear friend intervenes: engineer and suffragist Hertha Ayrton. The facts and circumstances of the play all come from actual letters, accounts, and newspaper articles. What we don't know is what was exactly said behind closed doors. That's when Gunderson's exacting, radiant imagination starts telling a story.

And that's when theatre artists use those words and transform them into something for you to experience as a community—of family, friends, and strangers alike.

It doesn't come together until you arrive to receive it. The fact that you're here is nothing short of miraculous! Your time and attention are precious and finite. The planning you've done to come to this space—in this treasure of a town—is something we will never take for granted.

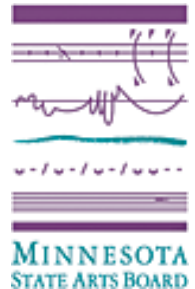
We hope you'll return again and again this year. Instability abounds out there, and we hope the Commonwealth can be a solid touchstone for exploring the complexities and commonalities of people.

Thank you for joining us.
—The Commonwealth Theatre Company



The Commonwealth Theatre Company is a member of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and a constituent member of Theatre Communications Group. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

208 Parkway Avenue N., P.O. Box 15
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Commonwealththeatre.org



THE COMPANY

THE ARTIST/ADMINISTRATOR MODEL

The Commonweal Theatre operates under a unique model in which all resident company members have specific, non-artistic responsibilities in addition to their artistic projects. As actors, designers, stage managers, and the like, they also serve as fundraisers, educators, marketers, builders, ushers, box office staff, and more. Company members come from all over the country and have made their home in Lanesboro. They work year-round to bring you a set of stories like the one you're about to experience.

LIZZY ANDRETTA (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2017

Actor/Development Associate/Dixon House Artist Residence Manager

This Season: Marley (*Lone Star Spirits*), Assistant Stage Manager (*The Half Life of Marie Curie*)

Commonweal Highlights: Miss Bennet: *Christmas at Pemberley*, *Rumors*, *She Loves Me*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Leading Ladies*, *Dancing Lessons*, *Sanders Family Christmas*, *Boeing Boeing*, *Dracula: Prince of Blood*, *The Elephant Man*. Choreographer for *A Christmas Carol* (2021), *Stones in His Pockets*, and *Peter & the Starcatcher*

Education: MFA in Acting from the East 15 Acting School; BS from Skidmore College
"I'm proud to call Lanesboro home alongside my beloved cat Henry."

CODY BEYER (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Technical Director and Facilities Manager

This Season: Director (*True West*, *Apprentice Capstone*), Lighting Designer (*Angel Next Door*), Drew (*Lone Star Spirits*), Kent (*King Lear*)

Commonweal Highlights: Mr. Darcy (*Christmas at Pemberley*); Stevie (*Ugly Lies the Bone*); Edmond Rostand (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*); Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Scenic Design); *Deathtrap* (Props Design) **Other Credits:** Chicago credits include: Banquo in *Macbeth* for Theatre-Y; and Technical Director for several Hell in a Handbag Productions

Education: BA Honors Theatre, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

"Here's to another year of sharing stories with this wonderful community!"

STELA BURDT (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2001

Actor/Music Director/Director of Administration

This Season: Hertha Ayrtton (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*)

Commonweal Highlights: *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *Women in Jeopardy*, *She Loves Me*, *Good People*, *Souvenir*, *Woody Guthrie's American Song*, *Crimes of the Heart*, *Zombies from the Beyond*, *A Midnight Dreary*, *Harvey*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Sanders Family Christmas*; sound design and music direction for various productions

Education: Proud graduate of Luther College with studies in music and theatre

"Continued gratitude to our community. Thank you for being here!"

#TeamScottyForever

HAROLD CROPP (he/they)



Company Member
Since 1992

Producing Artistic Director

This Season: Arthur (*The Angel Next Door*), Lear (*King Lear*), Scrooge (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Ernie Cusack (*Rumors*), Arthur Vance (*The Outsider*), Borkman (*John Gabriel Borkman*), Shylock (*The Merchant of Venice*), Groucho (*Groucho: A Life in the Theater*), Matt Friedman (*Talley's Folly*), Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*), Einstein (*Picasso at the Lapin Agile*). Director for 29 productions and playwright of 3 world premieres **Other Credits:** Managing Director, VITA Shakespeare Festival; actor with San Jose Stage Company, Magic Theater, San Jose Civic Light Opera; playwright of 4 additional published plays

Education: MFA National Theatre Conservatory; MBA Santa Clara University; BA Brown University

"My work honors my wife, Adrienne, and my family and ancestors."

THE COMPANY

SARA HUESER (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2022

Props Designer/Props Manager/IT Technician

This Season: Props Designer (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*, *Lone Star Spirits*, *King Lear*, *A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Props Designer (*Doubt: A Parable*, *Rumors*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *Bernhardt/Hamlet*), Co-Props Designer (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Sound Designer (*The Outsider*) **Other Credits:** Stage Manager for Centre Stage SC; Stage Manager and Deck Stage Manager for Savannah College of Art and Design. Sara is also an editor for movie and TV scripts

Education: BCompSc, Pennsylvania College of Technology; BFA in Dramatic Writing at Savannah College of Art and Design

JACLYN JUNE JOHNSON (she/they)



Company Member
Since 2020

Director of Production

This Season: Director (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*), Intimacy Coach (*The Angel Next Door*, *Lone Star Spirits*), Goneril (*King Lear*)

Commonweal Highlights: Director (*Rumors*, *Deathtrap*, *Leading Ladies*), Margie (*Good People*) **Other Credits:** Artistic Director 2013-2017 at St. Croix Festival Theatre; Acting and Directing Credits at St. Croix Festival Theatre; *Are We Delicious?*, StageQ, Broom Street Theatre, Save the Rainforest Plays; Riverside Theatre, Riverside Shakespeare Festival, Creede Repertory. Improv at Brave New Workshop, HUGE Theatre, UTG. Playwright; *A Christmas Carol*, *Sibling Bruises*, *Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and *Are We Delicious?* (co-writer for multiple productions).

Education: BA, Cornell College

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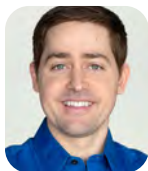
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THE COMPANY

JOSIAH LAUBENSTEIN (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2018

Actor/Marketing Associate/Literary Manager

This Season: Sound Designer (*Lone Star Spirits*), Edgar/Cornwall (*King Lear*), Sound Designer (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Dave (*The Outsider*), Georg (*She Loves Me*), Jack/Stephanie (*Leading Ladies*) **Other Credits:** Worked and directed at Rochester Community & Technical College (2024-2025)

Education: MFA in Acting, University of South Carolina; BA in Theatre, Concordia University, St. Paul

"Love to my wife, Rachel (without whom I would not be in Lanesboro) and my two truly remarkable children, Franny & Jude."

ISABELLA ANASTASIA LEIGH (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2023

Production Stage Manager/Administrative Team Associate

This Season: Rehearsal Stage Manager (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*), Production Stage Manager (*The Angel Next Door*, *King Lear*), Intimacy Coach (*King Lear*)

Commonweal Highlights: Rehearsal Stage Manager (*Doubt: A Parable*, *The Outsider*, *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *She Loves Me*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*); Rehearsal/Performance Stage Manager (*Rumors*, *Deathtrap*) **Other Credits:** Stage Management and Directing with: Austin Shakespeare, Jarrott Productions, ScriptWorks (Austin, TX); Broom Street Theatre, Children's Theatre of Madison, Forward Theater, Music Theatre of Madison, and StageQ (Madison, WI)

Education: BA in Gender & Women's Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Much love to my kitties: Rosalind, Beatrice, Mercutio, and Tybalt."

SYNTH MANUEL (they/them)



Company Member
Since 2023

Designer/Dramaturg/Assistant to the Technical Director

This Season: Sound Designer, Intimacy Coach (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*), Assistant Stage Manager, Props Designer (*The Angel Next Door*), Scenic Designer, Intimacy Coach (*King Lear*), Stage Manager (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Stage Manager (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Scenic Designer/Intimacy Coach (*Rumors*), Scenic Designer/Stage Manager/Intimacy Director (*The Effect*) **Other Credits:** Quad City Area Credits include: director (*The God of Vengeance*); stage manager (*Cabaret*, *Ride the Cyclone*); assistant director (*The Threepenny Opera*, *The Mountaintop*); dramaturg at The Spotlight Theatre

Education: BA in Theatre History and Tech & Design, Augustana College

"Be a voice. Not an echo."

JOHN B. NICOL (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Scenic Painter/Assistant to the Dir. of Administration

This Season: Watson (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Arthur de Bourgh (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), A.C. Peterson (*The Outsider*), Arpad Laszlo (*She Loves Me*), Michal (*The Pillowman*), Deputy (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*)

Education: BS in Theatre Arts, Minnesota State University, Mankato

"Listen to your life. It's showing you everything you need to know about who you can become." - Richard Bach



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THE COMPANY

MATTHEW JAMES RALPH (he/him)



Company Member
Since March 2025

Stage Manager/Marketing Associate/Assistant Director

This Season: Rehearsal Stage Manager, Assistant Director (*Lone Star Spirits*)

Other Credits: Stage Manager: Skylight Music Theatre (Milwaukee, WI), Stagedoor Manor (Loch Sheldrake, NY), Theatre Wit and About Face Theatre (Chicago, IL), Thin Air Theatre Company (Cripple Creek, CO), and The Clarence Brown Theatre (Knoxville, TN). Direction: Hattiesburg, MS: *The Bear*, *Stop Kiss*, *The Seagull* or *How to Eat It*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, and *Big Fish Elsewhere: Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*, *Homebound: A Play for Nobody*, *Charlie and The Chocolate Factory*.

Education: MFA in theatre, University of Southern Mississippi; BA in theatre & marketing, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

"...Thank you all for coming. A man is as rich as his friends. I am a tycoon."

LAURIE ROBERTS (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Development Associate/Apprentice Advisor

This Season: Marie (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*), Regan (*King Lear*), Irene (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Lizzy Darcy (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Chris (*Rumors*), Jess (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), 8 Shoppers (*She Loves Me*), Myra (*Deathtrap*), Duchess (*Alice in Winter Wonderland*), assistant director (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*), choreographer (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) **Other Credits:** In Chicago: A Red Orchid Theatre, Hell in a Handbag, Facility Theatre, Theatre Y, and Red Tape Theatre. Elsewhere: Know Theater, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, and Cincinnati Fringe Festival (2015 Producer's Pick.), and at On the Boards in Seattle. Her work has been devised and performed internationally in Pontlevoy, France, and at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Laurie also works as a teacher, movement director, and choreographer.

Education: MFA, University of South Carolina

"...for there is always light if only we're brave enough to see it, if only we're brave enough to be it." - "The Hill We Climb," Amanda Gorman

JODI RUSHING (they/she)



Company Member
Since 2019

Performance Stage Manager/Assistant to Costume Designer/Front of House Supervisor

This Season: Assistant to Costume Designer (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*, *King Lear*), Performance Stage Manager (*Lone Star Spirits*)

Commonweal Highlights: *The Outsider*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Good People*, *Leading Ladies*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]*, *I Love to Eat*, *On the Verge* **Other Credits:** Makeup Artist (*The Wonder of the World*...currently in post production), Stage Manager (Doniphan Dance Project)

Education: BA in Theatre & Film, University of Mississippi

TIM SAILER (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2021
(plus 2009-2011)

Actor/Assistant Director of Marketing

This Season: Oliver (*The Angel Next Door*), Edmund/King of France (*King Lear*)

Commonweal Highlights: *Rumors*, *Ugly Lies the Bone*, *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *She Loves Me*, *Leading Ladies*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. **Other Credits:** More than 50 roles across 35 plays at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA; Utah, Houston, and Texas Shakespeare Festivals; Park Square Theatre; Theater L'Homme Dieu; audiobook narrator

Education: MFA in Acting, University of Houston

"We must risk delight." – poet Jack Gilbert

THE COMPANY

ALEX SCHLESINGER (they/them)



Company Member
Since 2022

Actor/Designer/Assistant Technical Director

This Season: Projections Designer & Performance Stage Manager (*The Half-Life of Marie Curie*), Ben (*Lone Star Spirits*), Lighting Designer (*King Lear*), Crachit (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Bingley (*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*), Glenn (*Rumors*), Projections Design (*Ugly Lies the Bone*), Sound Design (*Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*), Clifford (*Deathtrap*), Stevie (*Good People*) **Other Credits:** Riff Raff (*The Rocky Horror Show*) at New Minowa Players in Decorah; Amos Hart (*Chicago*) at Luther College

Education: BA in Theatre, Luther College

"Thank you to my mentor, professor, and good friend Jeff Dintaman for his years of support and sharing of knowledge that has gotten me to where I am today."

ADRIENNE SWEENEY (she/her)



Company Member
Since 2001

Actor/Director of External Communications/Associate Artistic Director

This Season: Charlotte (*Angel Next Door*), Director (*Lone Star Spirits*)

Commonweal Highlights: Lulu Peakes (*The Outsider*), Sarah Bernhardt (*Bernhardt/Hamlet*), Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*) Sylvia (*Sylvia*) **Other Credits:** Commercial voice over artist

Education: MFA in Acting, University of Arizona

"I believe that sharing stories is an act of humanity and healing. Thank you for being here."

JEREMY van METER (he/him)



Company Member
Since 2012

Actor/Director of Development

This Season: Walter (*Lone Star Spirits*); Sherlock Holmes (*A Sherlock Carol*)

Commonweal Highlights: Doubt: A Parable; I Ought to Be in Pictures; Come Back; Dracula: Prince of Blood; Brand; The Philadelphia Story **Other Credits:** Caffeine Theatre (Chicago) Artistic Associate (2009-2011); Great River Shakespeare Festival (2009); Illinois Shakespeare Festival (2007); Riverside Theatre/Shakespeare Festival Actor in Residence (2000-03); Barter Theatre Actor in Residence (1991-95)

Education: MFA in Acting, University of Iowa

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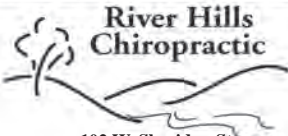
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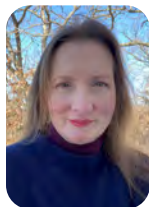
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BOOK BY JESSIE NELSON • LYRICS & MUSIC BY SARA BAREILLES



THIS PRODUCTION ALSO FEATURES...



PAUL EPTON (lighting designer, he/him) is back at the Commonweal for two productions this season: *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* and *Lone Star Spirits*. Past favorites here include *Come Back*, *Sanders Family Christmas*, and *Silent Sky*. He started designing lights as an undergraduate at Carleton College, spent 4 years in grad school (not in theatre) at Rice University, then returned north to Detroit. After 3 years in industry, he switched careers to theatre, stayed in Detroit for 11 more years, then moved to Minnesota in 1992. He continues to design and do tech work for numerous companies. A year-round bicyclist, one of his early designs was for *Spokesong*.



KIMBERLY K. MURPHY (costume designer, she/her) is excited to be joining the Commonweal for her fourth season for *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* and *King Lear*. Since 2000, Kim has been a costume designer at St. Croix Festival Theatre in St. Croix Falls, WI. Kim and her husband, James Shoop live an artistic life in St. Croix Falls and raised two beautiful souls Gabriel and Sienna. Kim and James can often be found at their Gallery at The Northrup King Building in N. Minneapolis. Kim received a B.S. in Apparel Design from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and AAS in Fashion Design From the Fashion Institute of Technology-NYC. With G & S in college, opportunities are ahead and sends love to all who have supported her.



GREG VANSELOW (scenic designer, he/him) has designed, directed, choreographed, stage managed, and performed with many companies throughout the Twin Cities over the past 30 years. A graduate of Hamline University's theatre program, Greg was the Technical Director and Resident Designer at Andover High School for more than eight school years, designing sets along with occasional lighting, costume, sound, and prop designs. Recent work includes set designs for *9 to 5*, *The Last Five Years*, *The Mousetrap*, and the *Christmas at Pemberley* trilogy (Lyric Arts of Anoka); *King Lear* (Theatre in the Round). gregvanselow.com, @GregVanselow (IG)



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Pictured: Serena Phillip and Alessandro Yokoyama in *Romeo and Juliet*. William Sturdivant and Emily Fury Daly in *The Comedy of Errors*.
Photos by Benjamin Boucvalt and Pedro Oliveira Figueiredo.

THE HALF-LIFE OF MARIE CURIE

by Lauren Gunderson

DESIGNERS & SPECIALISTS

Director	Jaclyn June Johnson
Costume Designer	Kimberly K. Murphy
Graphics/Projections Designer	Alex Schlesinger
Lighting Designer	Paul Epton
Props Designer	Sara Hueser
Scenic Designer	Greg Vanselow
Sound Designer & Intimacy Coach	Synth Manuel
Dialect Coach	Hal Cropp
Master Carpenter	Cody Beyer
Scenic Painter	John B. Nicol
Costume Assistant	Jodi Rushing
Carpentry Assistant	Dylan Delagardelle
Rehearsal Stage Manager	Isabella Anastasia Leigh
Rehearsal & Performance Stage Manager	Alex Schlesinger
Assistant Stage Manager	Lizzy Andretta

CAST

MARIE CURIE	Laurie Roberts
HERTHA ARYTON	Stela Burdt

SETTING

1911–1914, France and England

*This production will play without an intermission.
Please see the front of house staff for the precise run time.*

The Half-Life of Marie Curie was originally commissioned and produced by Audible Theater.
The Half-Life of Marie Curie is presented by special arrangement with Broadway Licensing, LLC, servicing the Dramatists Play Service collection. (www.dramatists.com)

PRODUCTION SPONSOR



SPECIAL THANKS

The Children's Theatre Company, Farzad Sadjadi and the Science Museum of Minnesota, Guthrie Theatre, Off-Leash Area, and St. Croix Festival Theatre.

COMMONWEAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chuck Aug, Alan Bailey, David Boen, Chris Hanson, Julie Kiehne, Sara Kling-Punt, Wendy Mattison, Ken Mogren, André Novack, Megan Pence, Sarah Peterson, Jose Rivas.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

LAUREN GUNDERSON has been 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 winner of the William Inge Distinguished Achievement in Theatre Award, the Lanford Wilson Award and a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. Notable plays include: *Ada and the Engine*, *The Book of Will*, *The Catastrophist*, *I and You*, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, *The Revolutionists*, *Silent Sky*, and the *Christmas at Pemberley* trilogy (with Margot Melcon). She is a playwright, screenwriter, musical book writer and children's author who lives in San Francisco. She graduated from NYU Tisch as a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship.



NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



Welcome to *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*, an imaginative exploration of the profound friendship between Marie Curie and Hertha Ayrton, two pioneering female scientists who navigated male-dominated scientific fields to leave their mark on history. Their friendship was a source of emotional and intellectual support, providing strength amidst the challenges they faced as women navigating the turn of the 20th century. While Marie Curie is a well-known figure, it is through her enduring friendship with (perhaps lesser-known) Hertha Ayrton that playwright Lauren Gunderson perfectly captures a slice of Curie's life—inviting us to further explore her life and legacy.

Though *Half-Life* takes place primarily during the summer of 1912, I'm struck by the relevance of this story in 2025. The unfair treatment which

Marie and Hertha encountered through scandal, politics, marginalization, and near erasure of their scientific contributions are reflected in the experiences of many women. Although much progress has been made, the sexism and misogyny faced by these characters are echoed still today: only three percent of Nobel Prizes in the sciences have ever been awarded to women, Marie Curie remains the only woman to have won two Nobel Prizes, and women remain underrepresented in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math).

Half-Life is a testament to the importance of female friendship as both a source of strength and a form of resistance. As we engage in the histories of Marie and Hertha, we are given an opportunity to acknowledge how far we've come scientifically, and how much further we still need to go toward creating spaces where women, and all people, can be fully recognized and supported equally in their pursuits.

A play about brilliance, courage, and legacy, *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* honors the fragility of the human condition while celebrating the unbreakable bond of two extraordinary scientists.



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MARIE CURIE



Marie Curie (born Maria Salomea Skłodowska on November 7, 1867, in Warsaw) was a physicist and chemist who pioneered research in radioactivity. Despite excelling in her studies, familial financial struggles forced her to work as a teacher and governess. In 1891, she moved to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, earning degrees in physics (1893) and mathematics (1894). She met Pierre Curie that same year, and although she initially declined his proposal to return to Poland, she later realized she could not pursue her field due to academic sexism. She returned to Paris, married Pierre in 1895, and pursued a PhD.

Fascinated by uranium's radiation, Marie and Pierre discovered polonium and radium in 1898. Between 1898 and 1902, they published 32 papers, including one showing radium's ability to destroy tumor cells. In 1903, Marie became the first woman to win a Nobel Prize in Physics, shared with

Pierre and Henri Becquerel.

After Pierre's death in 1906, she became the first female professor at the University of Paris. In 1910, she helped define the unit of radioactivity, the "curie." Despite her achievements, she faced xenophobia and scandal over an affair with physicist Paul Langevin. However, in 1911, she won her second Nobel Prize, this time in Chemistry, becoming the first person to receive two.

Her discoveries transformed medicine and physics, leading to advancements in cancer treatment and nuclear science. She died on July 4, 1934, from radiation exposure, leaving a lasting legacy for women in science.

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HERTHA AYRTON

Hertha Ayrton (born Phoebe Sarah Marks on April 28, 1854, in Portsea, England) was a pioneering engineer, mathematician, physicist, and inventor. The daughter of Polish-Jewish immigrants, she showed an early aptitude for science and mathematics. She attended Girton College, Cambridge, where she studied mathematics. Although Cambridge did not award degrees to women at the time, she passed the Mathematical Tripos exams in 1880.





After completing her education, she worked as a teacher while patenting her first invention, a line-divider, used in technical drawing. She later married physicist William Ayrton, who supported her scientific pursuits. Hertha Ayrton's most notable work focused on electric arcs, widely used for street lighting. She identified the causes of flickering and hissing in electric arcs and presented her findings to the Institution of Electrical Engineers (IEE) in 1899. She became the first woman admitted as a member of the IEE in 1902.

Her research extended to fluid dynamics, particularly on the formation of sand ripples and the behavior of air vortices. During World War I, she developed the Ayrton fan, designed to dispel poison gas from trenches. Despite her accomplishments, she faced institutional sexism, including being denied membership in the Royal Society.

A passionate advocate for women's rights, Ayrton was active in the suffrage movement. She died on August 26, 1923, leaving a legacy of groundbreaking contributions to science and engineering, paving the way for future women in STEM fields.

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ELEMENTS OF THE HALF-LIFE OF MARIE CURIE

FRENCH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES: A learned society, founded in 1666 by Louis XIV to encourage and protect the spirit of French scientific research.

HALF-LIFE: The time required for a quantity to reduce to half of its initial value. The term is used generally to characterize any type of exponential decay.

NOBEL PRIZE: 6 separate prizes—Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, Economic Sciences, and Peace—annually awarded to those who, during the preceding year, have conferred the greatest benefit to humankind. The Nobel Prizes are widely regarded as the most prestigious awards available in their respective fields.

ODE: A lyric poem in the form of an address to express the writer's feelings on a particular subject.

POLONIUM: A rare, radioactive metal found in nature, but usually made in laboratories.

RADIATION: Radiation is the release of energy in the form of invisible waves or tiny fast-moving particles. Some types, like high-energy radiation, can remove electrons from atoms, which can change or damage materials.

RADIUM: The chemical element and rare radioactive metal of alkaline earth series. It was formerly used as a source of radiation for radiotherapy.

RADIUM INSTITUTE: Under Marie Curie's direction, the Radium Institute in Paris became a world center for the study of radioactivity.

SUFFRAGETTE: A woman advocating for the right to vote.



Women's Social and Political Union members (Suffragettes) Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst, 1908.

QUESTION CORNER

Consider the following questions sometime after the performance—whether it's enjoying a meal in town or on your drive home:

- What are unforgettable moments, images, or lines from the play?
- You and your best friend are going to spend a summer together. Where are you going and what are you doing?
- Hertha is so inspired by the poem "Hertha" by Algernon Swinburne that she changes her name. If you could change your name to something, what would it be? Or is there something you've encountered that's so important/meaningful you got yourself a tattoo? Or some other gesture, token, or jewelry?
- What's your legacy?

OH, THOSE ODES!

If you read the script of *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*, you'll notice Lauren Gunderson labels some sections as odes (e.g. "Hertha's ode to the electric arc." and "Marie's ode to the radium in her pocket.")

WHAT IS AN ODE?

"A formal, often ceremonious lyric poem that addresses and often celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea." —The Poetry Foundation

An ode's structure can vary. Early forms had a strict stanza/rhyming structure. The odes of the English Romantic poets vary in stanza form. They often address an intense emotion at the onset of a personal crisis or celebrate an object or image that leads to revelation. (Both of which ring true in *The Half-Life of Marie Curie*.)

WRITE YOUR OWN ODE

- Pick something or someone to celebrate.
- Will it be free verse, or something more structured (with stanzas and rhymes)?
- Make a copy and share it with us—perhaps we'll even display it in our lobby or on social media!

FOR YOUR INSPIRATION

Here's a handful of actual ode titles to jumpstart your creativity:

"To a Skylark" by Percy Shelley

"To a Wreath of Snow" by Emily Brontë

"Ode to Hangover" by Dean Young

"Ode to Facemasks" by Xi Chuan

"Ode to the Tiniest Dessert Spoon in All Creation" by Karen An-Hwei Lee

"Ode to the Electric Fish that Eat Only the Tails of Other Electric Fish" by Thomas Lux

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— Jon & Mary Hart
Decorah, IA

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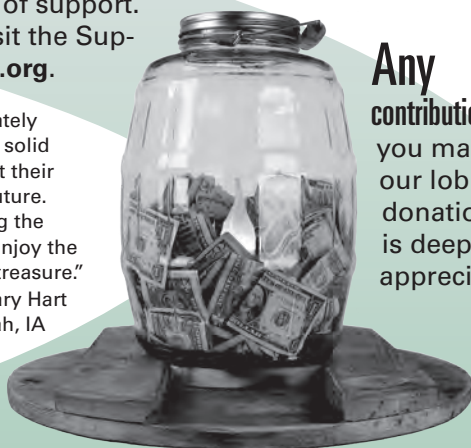
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Tony Chladek
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BY PAUL SLADE SMITH

MAY 24-
SEP 6

LONE STAR SPIRITS

BY JOSH TOBIESSEN

JUL 19-
OCT 25

KING LEAR

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

SEP 20-
NOV 2

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