

'Legacy of Light' receives West Coast premiere at San Jose Repertory Theatre

by [Chris Wright](#)

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Physicist Émilie du Châtelet, a young poet and lover of famous French philosopher Voltaire, worries about her fate after she unexpectedly becomes pregnant. Driven by fear and ambition, she races to publish her theories based on Sir Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion.



Two brilliant women, centuries apart, push the boundaries of science while grappling with motherhood in San Jose Repertory Theatre's production of *Legacy of Light*, by Karen Zacarías. DC Theatre Scene calls this adventurous comedy "... an intellectual joyride ... a wonderful play, well worth seeing." *Legacy of Light* is directed by Kirsten Brandt, and will run at the San Jose Rep from March 24 through April 17, 2011.

Physicist Émilie du Châtelet, a young poet and lover of famous French philosopher Voltaire, worries about her fate after she unexpectedly becomes pregnant. Driven by fear and ambition, she races to publish her theories based on Sir Isaac Newton's Laws of Motion. Meanwhile, 260 years in the future, accomplished astrophysicist Olivia and her husband Peter want to conceive but cannot. Olivia's attention turns to her new "child," a planet she's discovered in the midst of hiring a quirky and free-spirited surrogate. Two women, linked together by scientific legacy and maternal instincts, ask: Does the birth of a child ultimately mean as much to the world as the birth of an idea?

"I love plays that are not afraid to tackle the big existential questions, yet find wonderful new ways to entertain and tickle us at the same time," says San Jose Rep's Artistic Director Rick Lombardo. "But it's all too rare to find a new play that manages this difficult feat with the elegance, wit and delight I found in Karen Zacarías' new play when I first read it. From the creation of human life to the creation of new planets and the universe, Karen keeps a dizzying number of plates spinning in the air. I am so pleased that San Jose Rep will be introducing this new work in its West Coast Premiere."

A new play by Zacarías, *Legacy of Light* had its premiere in Washington, D.C., in 2009. In her review of the play's premiere, Rosalind Lacy said: "I left the theater levitating, believing that even miracles are

possible. Let's hope Zacarías keeps our local theaters alive and well, humming with the creative energy of her magical touch. Legacy of Light is a wonderful play, well worth seeing."

The play juxtaposes two eras, each with its own beliefs and attitudes towards physical science and the function of woman in society. A Stanford University graduate, Zacarías lightens what could be a compare-and-contrast exercise with magical realism and a deft feel for emotional nuance. The play received the American Theatre Critics Association "Best New Play" Award in 2010.

Playwright Karen Zacarías had stumbled across a footnote referring to Émilie du Châtelet while researching Einstein Is a Dummy, a children's play premiered by the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. Looking a little further into du Châtelet's life, Zacarías discovered that the French scientist had developed some of her most influential insights during a pregnancy late in life.

That fact seemed particularly resonant when Zacarías discovered she was pregnant with her third child. But just before giving birth, she received a commission from Arena Stage, a prestigious company in Washington, D.C., and she realized her creative life was not about to grind to a halt. Arena Stage presented the World Premiere of Legacy of Light in 2009.

The cast of Legacy of Light

Rachel Harker (ÉMILIE DU CHÂTELET) recently played Her Ladyship in San Jose Rep's production of The Dresser and Amanda in Rep on Tour's production of The Glass Menagerie. Off-Broadway, she was Lois Wilson in Bill W. and Dr. Bob. In the Boston area, Ms. Harker won the Elliot Norton and the IRNE awards for her portrayal of Blanche in A Streetcar Named Desire at New Repertory Theatre. She also won the IRNE for her work in Harold Pinter's Ashes to Ashes and The Lover at New Repertory Theatre, as well as The Cutting at Stoneham Theatre. Other productions include Lend Me a Tenor at Lyric Stage, Sherlock's Last Case at American Stage Festival and Amanda in Private Lives at The Public Theatre, Lewiston, Maine. Film work includes Disney's The Game Plan, The Invention of Lying, Don MacKay and The Legend of Lucy Keyes.

Carrie Paff (OLIVIA/WET NURSE) is thrilled to return to the Rep where she has also been seen in A Picasso, Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (a co-production with Arizona Theatre Company) and The Haunting of Winchester. Other credits include Small Tragedy, Betrayal and the critically acclaimed premiere of Collapse at Aurora Theatre Company; A Streetcar Named Desire and Sunlight at Marin Theatre Company; After the War at A.C.T.; Witness for the Prosecution and How the Other Half Loves at Center REP; and Joan Rivers: A Work In Progress at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and London's Leicester Square Theatre. Film work includes Presque Isle, Opal, This is Macbeth and This is Hamlet. She holds a master's degree in educational theatre from New York University and is the co-founder of StageWrite, Building Literacy through Theatre.

Mike Ryan (PETER/MONSIEUR DU CHÂTELET) is very pleased to make his debut with San Jose Rep. He has performed in more than 25 productions at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, most recently in Othello, Love's Labour's Lost and Shipwrecked! At Jewel Theatre Company, Mr. Ryan has played George in Of Mice and Men and Father Flynn in Doubt. He has also worked for the La Jolla Playhouse, the Geva Theatre Center in New York, and Shakespeare Festivals in Oklahoma, Texas, Idaho and Oregon. Mr. Ryan received his B.F.A. from Southern Methodist University and his M.F.A. from the University of California, San Diego. From 2003 through 2009, he was a lecturer in the theatre arts department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Mr. Ryan is a proud member of the Actors' Equity Association.

Kathryn Tkel (MILLIE/PAULINE) is returning to San Jose Repertory Theatre, having made her San Jose Rep debut in *Secret Order* earlier this season. Other Bay Area theatre credits include *Den of Thieves* and *The Story* at the San Francisco Playhouse; *The Kentucky Cycle* at Willows Theatre Company; *Steel Magnolias* at California Conservatory Theatre; *1001* at Just Theater; and multiple productions with Boxcar Theatre, including *Headspace*, *Animal Kingdom*, *Manners and Civility* and *Moon Fable*. She has also worked with TheatreWorks, Shotgun Players, Second Wind Productions, Collegiate Players, Dreamweavers Theatre and Playwrights Foundation. Ms. Tkel is a graduate of the University of California, Irvine, and holds degrees in both drama and anthropology.

Miles Gaston Villanueva (SAINT-LAMBERT/LEWIS) returns to San Jose Repertory Theatre having made his debut with San Jose Rep in last season's production of *Sonia Flew* (Zak/Jose). He recently traveled to New Mexico where he performed with a new company, Duke City Repertory Theatre, in their inaugural production, *Trust* (Cody). Some Bay Area favorites include *Sunsets and Margaritas* (Jojo) at TheatreWorks; and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Lysander) and *Julius Ceasar* (Octavius) with Shakespeare Santa Cruz. Other credits include *The Heart's Desire* (John Guerrero) at The Western Stage; *Tecumseh!* (Tecumseh) at Ohio's Sugarloaf Mountain Amphitheatre; and *Othello* (Iago) at the Woodward Shakespeare Festival. Mr. Villanueva received his B.A. in theatre arts at California State University, Fresno.

Robert Yacko (VOLTAIRE) was last seen at San Jose Rep as Older Saul in *Splitting Infinity*. He appeared on Broadway and in the National Tour of *Fiddler on the Roof* (Perchik and Fyedka) with Herschel Bernardi and director Jerome Robbins. In the Bay Area, Mr. Yacko was seen as Dad in TheatreWorks' production of *Distracted*. Regional credits include the Donmar Warehouse production of the Alfred Uhry/Jason Robert Brown epic, *Parade*, at the Mark Taper Forum; *Nightmare Alley* at the Geffen Playhouse; the Bernstein/Barrie Peter Pan (Hook/Mr. Darling) and *The Real Thing* (Henry) at The Santa Barbara Theater Company; *Sylvia* (Greg) with Cathy Rigby for Rigby/McCoy Productions; *Can Can-Revised* at Pasadena Playhouse; and *Five Course Love* at Sacramento Repertory Theater. He starred in the Los Angeles premiere of *Sunday in the Park with George* (George) and also appeared in *Company* (Paul) with Carol Burnett and Patrick Cassidy; *Into the Woods* (Baker) with Leslie Uggams; and *Chess* (Anatoly). He appeared in the West Coast premiere of *Romance/Romance* (Alfred/Sam) at the Old Globe, and in *Marry Me A Little* (Man) at South Coast Rep. Screen credits include *Raising Helen*, *The Closer* with Tom Selleck, *General Hospital*, *Golden Girls* and *Get a Life*.

Sara Luna (U/S MILLIE/PAULINE) is proud to be part of this production of *Legacy of Light* at San Jose Repertory Theatre. Her theatre credits include *Private Eyes* (Cory) with Dragon Productions Theatre Company, *All This Intimacy* (Becca) with Renegade Theatre Experiment, *Perla* (Mariposa) with Teatro Visión and *Dinner* (Ani) with Golden Thread Productions. Ms. Luna is a recent graduate of San Jose State University earning a B.A. in theatre arts. Her educational credits include *Secret in the Wings* (Princess Who Wouldn't Laugh), *Death of a Salesman* (The Woman) and *Big Love* (Adara). She was also privileged to perform in the 2005 Edinburgh Fringe Festival as *Mother Courage* in *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Kevin Wulf (U/S SAINT-LAMBERT/LEWIS) is a senior musical theatre major at San Jose State University. His previous work includes *The Seagull* (San Jose State University); *Swing!* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Cabrillo Stage); *Of Corpse!* (San Jose State Company One); *Beauty and the Beast* and *Puss in Boots* (Magic Carpet Theatre); and *Urinetown* (TRFT Independent).

Artistic Collaborators

Karen Zacarías' (PLAYWRIGHT) plays include *Legacy of Light*, *Mariela in the Desert*, *The Book Club Play*, *The Sins of Sor Juana*, the adaptation of the best-selling book *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, and children's musicals *Looking for Roberto Clemente*, *Einstein is a Dummy*, *Jane of the Jungle*, *Cinderella Eats Rice and Beans*, *Ferdinand the Bull* and *Frida Libre*. Her plays have been produced at The Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, The Goodman Theatre, Denver Center Theatre Company, La Jolla Playhouse, Alliance Theater, Round House Theatre, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Arden Theatre Company, Cleveland Playhouse and many more. Her awards include the 2010 Steinberg Citation for Best New Play (*Legacy of Light*); the National Francesca Primus Prize (*Mariela in the Desert*); and the New Voices Award, the National Latino Play Award, the ATT/TCG First Stages Award, finalist for the Susan S. Blackburn Award and a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play (*Sins of Sor Juana*). In addition, she has commissions from South Coast Rep, Arena Stage, Denver Center Theatre Company and Arena Stage. Ms. Zacarías is the playwright-in-residence at Arena Stage and teaches playwriting at Georgetown University. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and three young children and is a graduate of Stanford University.

Kirsten Brandt (DIRECTOR) is enjoying her return to San Jose Rep, where she previously directed *Groundswell*, *Splitting Infinity*, *This Wonderful Life* and *Rabbit Hole*. Other directing credits include *TheatreWorks*, *The Old Globe*, *San Diego Repertory Theatre*, *La Jolla Playhouse*, *Shakespeare Santa Cruz*, *North Coast Repertory Theatre*, *Sierra Repertory Theatre*, *Diversions Theatre*, *The Fritz Theater*, *Playwrights Project*, *New Dramatists* and various universities. She was the artistic director of *Sledgehammer Theatre* from 1999-2005, where she produced 23 theatrical events, directed 15 productions and wrote *The Frankenstein Project*, *NU: Parts I & III*, and *Berzerkergang*. Her play, *The Waves*, received its world premiere at *Vox Nova Theatre Company*. She is the recipient of numerous KPBS awards, a *Backstage West Garland Award* and two *San Diego Critics Circle awards*.

William Bloodgood (SCENIC DESIGNER) last designed for San Jose Repertory Theatre in the 2005 production of *The Haunting of Winchester*. Additional designs for the Rep include *'Art'* and *The Odd Couple*. Well known in American regional theatres, Mr. Bloodgood's designs have been seen at many, including *Arena Stage* in Washington, D.C., *Arizona Theatre Company*, *Berkeley Repertory Theatre*, *Alley Theatre* in Houston, *Chicago Shakespeare Theater*, *Denver Center Theatre Company*, *Hong Kong Repertory Theatre*, *Indiana Repertory Theatre*, *Intiman Theatre* in Seattle, *the Old Globe Theatre* in San Diego, *Portland Center Stage*, *Seattle Repertory Theatre* and *Syracuse Stage*, as well as the *Oregon Shakespeare Festival*, where he has designed the scenery for 150 productions. He is the recipient of many awards for his designs, including the *Oregon Governor's Award for the Arts* in 2002.

Brandin Barón (COSTUME DESIGNER) previously designed *Splitting Infinity* and *This Wonderful Life* for San Jose Repertory Theatre. His regional credits include: *La Bête* (*Asolo Repertory Theatre*); *Cloud Tectonics*, *Dogeaters*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *Our Town* (*La Jolla Playhouse*); *Imaginary Invalid*, *Uncle Vanya*, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *The Illusion* (*San Diego Repertory Theatre*); *Dogeaters* (*NY Shakespeare Festival/The Public Theater*); *The Buddy Holly Story* (*Apollo Theater, Chicago*); *The Tempest*, *Endgame* and *Love's Labours Lost* (*Shakespeare Santa Cruz*); *American Hwangap*; *Monkey Room*, and *K of D* (*Magic Theatre*); and *Private Jokes*, *Public Places* (*Aurora Theatre*). Mr. Barón is an associate professor of design at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

David Lee Cuthbert (LIGHTING AND MEDIA DESIGNER) returns to San Jose Rep, having previously designed scenery and media for *Secret Order* and *As You Like It*, and lighting for *The Dresser*, *Rabbit Hole*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Groundswell* and *The Kite Runner*, for which he received the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for best lighting of a play. He lit Billy Crystal's Tony® Award-winning *700 Sundays on Broadway*, as well as its international tours. Mr. Cuthbert's work has also been seen at Opera San Jose, Arena Stage, South Coast Repertory, Intiman Theatre, San Diego Repertory Theatre, American Repertory Theater and Arizona Theatre Company. This is his 40th collaboration with Director Kirsten Brandt. Mr. Cuthbert is the theater arts department chair and an associate professor of design at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Jeff Mockus (SOUND DESIGNER) marks his 70th production for San Jose Rep with *Legacy of Light*, having served as Resident Sound Designer from 1994-2007, and returning regularly as a guest artist. Among his favorites, Mr. Mockus includes *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *This Wonderful Life*, *The Haunting of Winchester*, *Rounding Third*, *Enter the Guardsman*, *Communicating Doors* and *Thunder Knocking on the Door*. His work on *Old Wicked Songs* and *Mary's Wedding* earned Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle awards, while *By the Bog of Cats*, 'ART' and *Major Barbara* received Dean Goodman Choice awards. Recent credits include *Clybourne Park* and *War Music* for A.C.T.; *Superior Donuts* for TheatreWorks; *Mrs. Warren's Profession* and *Private Lives* for Cal Shakes; *Shipwrecked!* for Shakespeare Santa Cruz; as well as *The Woman in Black*, *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* for Utah Shakespearean Festival.

Dave Maier (FIGHT DIRECTOR) is an award-winning fight director whose work was seen in San Jose Rep's *As You Like It*. His talents have also been utilized at ACT, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Magic Theatre and Shakespeare Santa Cruz. He is the resident fight director at Cal Shakes and a company member with the Shotgun Players in Berkeley. Recent performance credits include *Ajax the Great* in the Shotgun Players production of *In the Wound* and *Swordsman* in San Francisco Opera's production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, where he served as fight double for Placido Domingo. Mr. Maier teaches theatrical combat at Berkeley Rep School of Theatre and is a founding member of Dueling Arts San Francisco.