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## LEGACY OF LIGHT

A Confusing Play with Excellent Acting

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(L to r) *Émilie du Chatelet* (**Rachel Harker**) and *Voltaire* (**Robert Yacko**)

SAN JOSÉ, California – In “**LEGACY OF LIGHT**,” described as “ An adventurous comedy” by DC Theatre Scene, that made its West Coast premier at San Jose Rep, playwright Karen Zacarías puts so much scientific jargon in the mouth of Olivia, that Carrie Paff, the actress who played the role, had no chance to develop her character.



***Carrie Paff in her role of Astrophysicist Olivia in LEGACY OF LIGHT***

In several monologues, Olivia, who represents an Astrophysicist in the play, lectures (her audience in the play) about:

Dark Matter: the mysterious form of matter that we can't observe in the universe.

Dark energy: A uniform repulsive energy through the universe that is actually pushing the universe apart. For a while, most scientists, including Einstein believed that this so called Dark Energy was zero (or slightly negative, ) but recent findings have indicated the the expansion is increasing, and therefore, the cosmological constant has a positive, instead of a negative value. While Repulsive gravity pushes galaxies apart, Attractive gravity tries to pull them together.

Gravity: which may be divided into two physical laws represented by two fields of studies: Quantum physics, which studies the smallest objects in nature, and Relativity which studies the larger objects such as the planets. And Unification of forces: a Law which tries to unify the four forces in the universe: (1) The electro-magnetic force, (2) the strong nuclear force, (3) the weak nuclear force and gravity in a single theory.

As if all these Physic Laws that Olivia describes briefly in the play were not enough to confuse the audience, Zacarías' increases the confusion with a play that relates two stories. On the stage, these stories take place at the same time, even when they happened at a completely different time in the play. According to the play, one story took place in France in the 1700's and the other story is taking place in New Jersey now. The first set of french characters are already dead, but the play shows them alive acting along with the New Jersey's members of the family. By showing the two parallel stories, LEGACY OF LIGHT tries to persuade the audience into believing that the combination of Physical Laws equal reincarnation. (Not true).

The main flaw in LEGACY OF LIGHT, however, is that playwright Zacarías wanted to relate two stories in one play: The story of Émilie du Chatêlet and her family (whose lives alone will have enough material for a novel) plus the story of Olive and Peter. Her problem was that there was so much material in these stories that she was unable to adapt the

material on a drama. The result, was that the stories are told in the play, but the play has only few tri dimensional characters.

The more poorly developed character is Olivia (Carrie Paff) who we meet after she had totaled her car. All we learn about her is that she is a brilliant Astrophysicist who discovered the possible formation of a new comet. As a person, that ovarian cancer left her sterile, and that she is 42 years old.

The play portrays her as a cold person. When she discusses having a child, using a surrogate mother, with her husband Peter (Mike Ryan) she talks with the same detachment one could talk before going shopping for groceries. After she finds the surrogate mother, in Millie, ( Kathryn Tkel) Olivia does not seem to care for the baby. She misses Millie's appointments with the pediatrician.

Olivia is the main character in the "NOW" part of the play, yet when Zacarias, created her, the playwright put so much science jargon in her mouth that the character lacks humanity.

Maybe because Olivia's husband, Peter, (Mike Ryan) has more dialogue and he talks enthusiastically about the children that as a 3rd grade teacher he is teaching to read, Peter is more human. Sadly we don't hear him talking much about his future son, because his part in the the play is very small.

The only three-dimensional character in the "Now" part of the play is Kathryn Tkel, who plays the role of Millie, the surrogate mother. To Millie, playwright Zacarias gave not only motivation, but background and a touching story. We need to add here that Tkel represented his character with excellence.



*(l to r) Millie (Kathryn Tkel) and Olivia (Paff)*

On the 1700's part of the play, as a character, Émilie (Rachel Harker) is better developed. Émilie, is a genius and a well educated woman (rare for women in the 1700's) whose husband, a Marquis, had paid private tutors to instruct her at home in mathematics, physics and languages. The play shows more of her human side, Émilie is also a passionate woman, with a good husband, two children and two lovers, one of them, Voltaire, who shares her house and lives with her, her husband and her children. The other Saint Lambert a young poet who makes her pregnant. Émilie has the best scene that night, when she talks to her daughter, after realizing that she is pregnant, and tells her the reasons why she had decided to have the baby.

In the play, Saint Lambert (Miles Gaston Villanueva) is so poorly developed as a character that we learn very little about him. We only know that he is her lover because the first time we see him he is having rendezvous with Émilie.

Another poorly developed character is Pauline (Tkel) All we know about her daughter is that she is being forced to marry a man she does not love because her mother thinks that she is going to die at child birth because of her age

.The more more poorly developed character in this story however, is Monsieur du Chatelet, Émilie's husband. His part may be described as "A talking head." He never questions his wife's lovers and his longest scene shows him coming from a trip bringing Pauline a beautiful piece of white silk for her (who likes to design) to make her own wedding gown.

With a little more dimension as a character is Voltaire (Robert Yacko) and we should add that in all his scenes, Yacko acts in character. As Voltaire the actor has a slight chance to show his feeling for Émilie by calling her "a Goddess," and even fighting for her when he gets involved in sword's fight with Saint Lambert, Émilie's younger lover.



**(l to r) Rachel Harker as Émilie du Chatêlet with lover Saint-Lambert (Miles Gaston Villanueva) in LEGACY OF LIGHT of San José Rep**

In spite of the plays' flaws, the direction of Kirsten Brandt made the acting of all the actors superb, and the scientific jargon of Olivia (Paff) managed to keep the audience's attention while trying to apply the Laws of Physics to the story, or not knowing enough physics to understand them, just trying to figure out what Olivia was talking about.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF GABRIELLE ÉMILIE DU CHÂTELET**

French Physicist Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil was born in 1706 to Alexandra Elizabeth de Froulay and Louis Nicolas Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, later she married the Marquis du Chatêlet

As a child, living in Paris after the death of Louis XIV, Émilie studied through tutors and was encouraged to study mathematics, which along with Philosophy became her favorite subjects.

Being tall, energetic and not at all graceful, as a child she was given lessons in fencing, riding and gymnastics to improve her awkwardness. Later on her education was through tutors and, being a genius, her own studies. She learned to read and write and studied Latin and because she had an aptitude for languages by the age of twelve she spoke fluent German, Latin and Greek and later on learned English, Italian and some Spanish. Being an aristocracy she spent much of her time in her room studying mathematics and science. She liked to dance, play the spinet, sang opera and act.

Her intelligence was so superior, that women of the time avoided her because she had no interest in gossip and her devotion was to intellectual pursuits. She was also avoided by some men. In spite of it, in 1725 at the age of nineteen,

Émilie married the Marquis Forent-Claude Chastellet, a military man who was governor of semur-en Auxois in Burgundy. He first child Françoise Gabriel Pauline was born in 1726, and a son on November 20 1727.

In 1733 Émilie du Chatélet and the Duc de Richelieu (The grand nephew of the Cardinal) became lovers. The affair lasted for a year and a half. After two other affairs, she started an affair with Voltaire.

While she could not attend the university because she was a woman, her husband supported her pursuit of knowledge by employing a professor in Physics and Mathematics to tutor her at home.

In 1733 when Émilie was 28 she met Voltaire again when he was 39 and a famous playwright, poet and businessman. Being intellectual equals, they began a love affair that lasted for years. When in 1734 Voltaire had to go into hiding because of his anti-French writings. He went to live in Cirey at a house owned by Émilie's husband. She joined him there. It appears that her husband did not mind the arrangement.

During 1735 and 1739 she wrote several books among them translations and scientific books. Her translation into French from the Latin text of Principia by Isaac Newton remains the authoritative translation of Newton's work.

Émilie died in 1749 shortly after her fourth child died shortly after birth.

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