Some Plays (and Films) about Astronomers
A Listing by Andrew Fraknoi (Fromm Institute, U. of San Francisco)

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NOTE: This is a first attempt at compiling a list of plays and films about astronomers. No claim is made for completeness and additional suggestions are most welcome. (A list of operas and other music about astronomers is included in my topical listing of astronomy-inspired music: http://bit.ly/astronomymusic )

PLAYS ABOUT (OR FEATURING) ASTRONOMERS:

φ Chemers, Krumholz, and Bierman: Birth of Stars. This experimental play, one of whose authors (Mark Krumholz) is an astronomer, performed at the U. of California, Santa Cruz, has a teenage astronomy prodigy as its protagonist, and deals with her life and her obsession with the lives of stars:
https://news.ucsc.edu/2014/10/stars-art-science.html and
Hailey Shapiro’s thesis analyzing the play and its educational effects is available:
https://escholarship.org/content/qt6tf6c312/qt6tf6c312.pdf

φ Coughran, Bruce: A Time for Hawking. 2022, Indra’s Net Theater Press. A play about the young Hawking, before his illness was diagnosed, and Jayant Narlikar. A review of the first production is at:

φ Gabridge, Patrick: Reading the Mind of God (a play about Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe). The text can be found at:
http://webs.wofford.edu/zidessb/Theatrefiles/reading%20the%20mind%20of%20god.pdf
A synopsis and history of productions is at: http://www.gabridge.com/full-length-plays/reading-the-mind-of-god/
(A song from the play is performed here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXjwZlqIwos](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXjwZlqIwos))


For more about the dramatist: [http://laurengunderson.com/](http://laurengunderson.com/)

Gunderson, Lauren: *Background* (about Ralph Alpher and getting credit for the prediction of the cosmic microwave background radiation.) The text of the play is available in the author’s compilation *Deepen the Mystery: Science and the South Onstage* (2005, I Universe), which also includes a short comic play about Isaac Newton.


Hood, Kevin *The Astronomer’s Garden* (a play about John Flamsteed and Edmund Halley)
Printed version available: [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Astronomers-Garden-Beached-Theatrescripts-Modern/dp/0413650804](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Astronomers-Garden-Beached-Theatrescripts-Modern/dp/0413650804)


Lonergan, Kenneth: *The Starry Messenger* (about an astronomy instructor at the old Hayden Planetarium on the eve of its being torn down, was staged in NY with Matthew Broderick):


Nicholas, Siobhán: *Stella* (another play about Caroline Herschel): http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2012/may/14/play-astronomer-caroline-herschel

Pachino, Jamie: *Splitting Infinity* (a woman astrophysicist, a rabbi who has known her since childhood, and her Christian Scientist post-doc explore the boundaries between science and religion and the existence of God) Review: https://www.sfgate.com/performance/article/Theater-review-Splitting-Infinity-3189007.php About the Playwright: http://www.jamiepachino.com/Home


Sobel, Dava (author of *Longitude* and *Galileo’s Daughter*) has written a play about Copernicus called “And the Sun Stood Still,” which she discusses and includes in her book, *A More Perfect Heaven* (2011, Walker Books.) For her discussion of how she came to write the play, see: http://astrosociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ab2011-83.pdf

Sparks, John & Alben, Russ *The Smartest Man in the World* (a musical about Albert Einstein, performed briefly in Los Angeles). See: http://www.curtainup.com/smartestmanla.html

Stoppard, Tom *Galileo*. 2003, Arete. (This is the full text of a previously unpublished and unperformed play written in 1970 by an internationally renowned playwright who often incorporates scientific ideas in his plays.)


Operas about astronomers include: *Einstein on the Beach*, *Galileo Galilei*, and *Kepler* by Philip Glass and *The Harmony of the World* by Paul Hindemith (about Kepler.)
A FEW OLDER PLAYS:

- Bertold Brecht’s *Life of Galileo* (1994, Grove Press reprint English edition), a 1938 play about Galileo’s discoveries and how they upended the establishment views of nature and our place in it. See also the 1974 DVD of the filmed version directed by Joseph Losey, and starring Topol as Galileo, available on King Video (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073029/). For more about the play, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_of_Galileo


- *Good News* -- a 1927 musical, book: Laurence Schwab and B.G. DeSylva, lyrics: DeSylva and Lew Brown, and music by Ray Henderson. In the 1920s at Tait College, football player Tom Marlowe falls in love with Connie Lane, who is tutoring him so he can pass astronomy and be eligible to play in the big game. The astronomy professor has a role in the madcap plot as well. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_News_(musical)

SOME MOVIES ABOUT (OR FEATURING) ASTRONOMERS (a very incomplete list):

- *Addicted to Love*. (Matthew Broderick plays an astronomer in this 1997 romantic comedy from the U.S., but the astronomy is completely incidental): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118556/plotsummary


- *The Heavenly Body* (a 1944 comedy, where William Powell plays an astronomer whose neglected wife, Hedy Lamarr, turns to an astrologer for advice about her romantic life): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0035980/


*Roxanne* (a 1987 US film that modernizes *Cyrano de Bergerac*, has Daryl Hannah as an astronomer who comes to a small town to look at a comet: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roxanne_(film) )

*The Theory of Everything* (2014 film in which Eddie Redmayne won an Oscar for playing Stephen Hawking; is about Hawking’s graduate school career, discovery of his illness, marriage, etc. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Theory_of_Everything_(2014_film) )

*Thor* (2011 film from the Marvel comic book series, in which Natalie Portman plays an astrophysicist who is Thor’s love interest. The film mixes Nordic mythology with science (including wormholes).

*Top Gun* (1986 film in which Kelly McGillis plays an astrophysicist who is also an Air Force pilot trainer)

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**SOME RELEVANT ARTICLES:**


For lists of plays about science in general, see such web sites as:

- https://sciart.commons.gc.cuny.edu/staging-science/four-centuries-of-science-plays/
- http://scienceplays.org/

A listing of films that feature characters who are astronomers can be found at: https://bestsimilar.com/tag/17845-astronomer