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Dramatic Publishing

LUNACY

A Full-Length Play

by

PATRICIA WEAVER-FRANCISCO



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(LUNACY)

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PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

In 1983, Sally Ride became the first American woman astronaut to go into space. But twenty years earlier, thirteen American women pilots successfully completed the preliminary physical and psychological testing given the Mercury astronauts. They believed at least one of their number would eventually go into space, but their testing program was abruptly cancelled in 1962 and they faded from public view. *LUNACY* is a play about the other side of "The Right Stuff"—a fictional look at what became of Ride's predecessors.

The knowledge that women had been a footnote in the space program from the very beginning, coupled with Sally Ride's mission in 1983, led me to thoughts about disappointment and age, about the possibility of a feminine perspective on the sky, and a renewed appreciation for the legacy of courage which women have left to one another. *LUNACY* is my vision of what might have happened to one of these pioneering women and is not intended to represent the actual lives or thoughts of the thirteen original women astronaut candidates.

Progress is a series of individual acts of courage. To appreciate it, sometimes we must look back.

Patricia Weaver Francisco
May, 1984

LUNACY

A Play In One Act

For Seven Women*

(In order of appearance)

JEAN CROSS a former astronaut candidate
CORONA SMITH a reporter
MARTHA HOWLAND..... an astrophysicist
REPORTER 1 an interviewer
REPORTER 2 an interviewer
REPORTER 3 an interviewer
ANNE LESTER..... a space engineer
CLAIRE WILKINS a NASA executive
CHILD the young Jean
TECHNICIAN 1 a NASA employee
TECHNICIAN 2 a NASA employee
TECHNICIAN 3 a NASA employee
WOMAN a rememberer
CAROLINE HERSCHEL..... an astronomer
GALILEO'S DAUGHTER..... an astronomer
MARIA MITCHELL diarist
VALENTINA TERESHKOVA... the first female Cosmonaut
PLEIADES 1..... a star
PLEIADES 2..... a star
PLEIADES 3..... a star
ASTRONAUT 1 Geraldine Sloan
ASTRONAUT 2..... Rhea Allison
ASTRONAUT 3 Jan Dietrich

(continued on next page)

*An ensemble of three or four actresses may play a variety of roles, or if a large cast is desired all roles may be played by different actresses. Two male voices are needed offstage.

(continued)

ASTRONAUT 4..... Jean Cross
ASTRONAUT 5..... Bernice Trimble Steadman
ASTRONAUT 6..... Marion Dietrich
ASTRONAUT 7..... Sarah Lee Gorelick
ASTRONAUT 8..... Jerrie Cobb
ASTRONAUT 9..... Clarissa Robertson
ASTRONAUT 10..... Myrtle Cagle
ASTRONAUT 11..... Jean Hixson
ASTRONAUT 12..... Irene Leverton
ASTRONAUT 13..... Jane Hart
ASTRONAUT 14..... Mary Wallace Funk
BETSY BELL..... a talk show host
LINDA..... a model
ARTEMIS..... a Greek goddess
SPACEWALKER 1..... a Motown chorus girl
SPACEWALKER 2..... a Motown chorus girl
SPACEWALKER 3..... a Motown chorus girl

TIME: The Very Near Future.

PLACE: New Mexico, Houston, Outer Space.

NOTE: Please see the end of script (after p66) for two pages (49a and 49b) that were left out of text. They should come after p49. And then continue on with p50. Sorry for the inconvenience.

LUNACY was originally commissioned by the Women's Theatre Project and was first presented at the Hennepin Center for the Arts in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 4, 1984. It was directed by Carolyn Levy, the set design was by Chris Johnson, costume and lighting design by Nayna Ramey, sound design by Lawrence Fried, stage managed by Kate Houston. The cast was:

JEAN CROSS Buffy Sedlacek

CORONA SMITH Sharon Hentges

MARTHA HOWLAND Elizabeth Rohm

CLAIRE ROBERTSON Margaret Shryer

CAROLINE HERSCHEL

ARTEMIS Estelene Bell

GALILEO'S DAUGHTER

LINDA Emily Houpt

MARIA MITCHELL

VALENTINA TERESHKOVA

BETSY BELL Miriam Monasch

THE REPORTERS

THE PLEIADES

THE SPACEWALKERS Estelene Bell, Emily Houpt,
Miriam Monasch

PRODUCTION NOTES

There is no need to strive for realism in the set design for LUNACY. The various locations can be suggested through an imaginative treatment of costumes and props. Three playing areas are suggested for the staging of LUNACY. Each can be constructed of scaffolding in combination with cubes and metal or wood platforms. The areas and their requirements are:

1. Jean's cabin: A porch area and a rooftop platform are needed. External or internal stairs can be used to reach the rooftop platform. No interior space is necessary.

2. The space capsule: Multi-level scaffolding with a swing or swinging chair suspended within. Again, stairs or a ladder are needed and a platform below and/or above the swing is helpful.

3. The space flight: Cubes of varying heights (if possible in combination with a scaffolding platform) can be used to stage the space flight. A ladder or staircase is preferred but not necessary.

All scenes not included above can be played in front of the three scaffolding areas. A cube positioned near the space capsule can also be used for these scenes. Props and furnishings should be minimal, though imagination in costuming can greatly enhance the space flight scene.

There is considerable flexibility in the sound and lighting design. All that is necessary is the ability to play tape-recorded voices and music. However, rear projected slides of stars, planets, and the moon, and a fog machine and sound effects (for take off and space flight scenes) will enhance the production. Photographs of the original thirteen women astronaut candidates can be found in *Life* magazine, June, 1963.

CHARACTER NOTES

JEAN CROSS: a woman in her mid-fifties who lives alone in the New Mexico desert. A pilot and former astronaut candidate.

CORONA SMITH: an overzealous reporter for the *Feminist Hard Times*.

MARTHA HOWLAND: an astrophysicist in her late twenties. She is about to be America's first woman to solo in space.

CLAIRE ROBERTSON: a NASA executive in charge of public relations. A "company" person in her fifties.

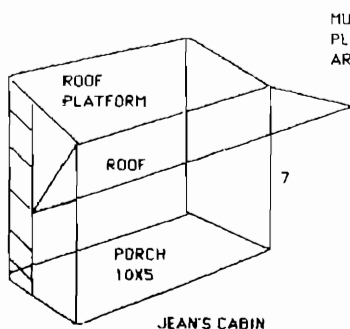
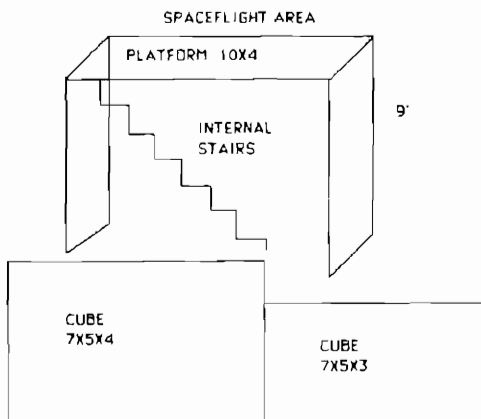
SET DESIGN

PROJECTION
STAND

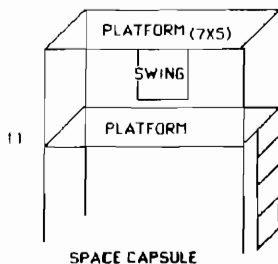


REAR PROJECTION SCREEN 6 X 8

(ALL PLAYING AREAS
CONSTRUCTED OF
SCAFFOLDING)



MULTIPURPOSE
PLAYING
AREA



LUNACY

SCENE: It is October in the New Mexico desert. The stage is dark, lit only by the stars coming on bit by bit. A new moon hangs in the sky. We hear a Frank Sinatra song and JEAN enters from her cabin onto her porch, singing along and taking a turn or two with an imaginary partner. She's dressed in cowboy boots and jeans. Turquoise jewelry is her only vanity. She walks center stage and addresses the sky.

JEAN. Old moon's in the arms of the new. *(She begins to call out the names of the constellations as if greeting her neighbors.)* Evening Andromeda, Cassiopeia. Pegasus, there you are! And where is he? It's nearly October. Ah, what's the rush? Behind him come a great swirling of flabby tourists and desert storms. Take your time Great Hunter. Turbulence is what you bring. *(Rolling her head from side to side, stretching the neck muscles.)* How ancient a pleasure it is to throw back one's head and look up into the sky. *(She walks to the porch, turns on a small light, revealing a table of bonsai trees in pots.)* Probably because I am ancient. And stiff. And tired. *(Singing along with the record again while examining the plants.)* Look at you. Like a common cactus, spread out all over the place. I can't be gone a week that you don't need trimming. I apologize for not being Japanese. But I am devoted to you. *(Bows slightly from the waist. She climbs the stairs to the roof and looks through the telescope, greeting the stars by name.)* Such a clear night. Good evening Agena, Altair, Al Bali, CorHydra, Gemma, Hamal, Media, Polaris, Rastaban, Sabik, Tarazed, Zubeneschamali. Good evening, good evening. *(Sing-songs.)* How I wonder what you are. *(Straightening and talking directly to the sky.)* Had a hell of a trip this time. Rained the whole week—smoky fires all over the village. Pilar is pregnant again. They were glad for the drugs and the bandages. Oh, we're all glad

for the drugs, aren't we? I stayed with the Hernandez crowd—she's a terrible cook, that one, gritty tortillas and greasy soup. And now, to settle my business with you, Jupiter. I need another month with the carburetor on my plane. I've got to make three more trips into the jungle. So keep it going, please. And Venus—my goddess, Inanna—bless this night. (*Reciting a prayer to the brilliance of Venus.*) The great queen of Heaven, Inanna I will hail...

Of her majesty, of her greatness,
of her brilliant coming forth in the evening sky,
of the greatness of the holy one of Heaven,
to the lady, I will sing. (*The music plays a few moments and the lights fade to black. JEAN exits.*)

(*Lights come up on CORONA, who enters carrying a huge tote bag and an open can of Tab.*)

CORONA. Reporter Jumps Off Bridge, Can't Swim. (*Rummaging around in the tote bag. CORONA empties the bag—a six-pack of Tab, notebooks, dozens of pens, a small tape recorder and microphone, a 35mm camera and flashbulbs. She spreads it out on the stage, looking for the missing tape.*) Where's that tape? What becomes of paper clips? And Bic pens—where do they go? “Expect to find it in the last place you look,” says my mother, the Queen of Shelf Paper. I've lost a dozen earrings but I've never found a single one. (*Consults her watch.*) 11:58. I've got two minutes. I've never done anything in my life in two minutes. (*Finding the tape stuck between the pages of a paperback book. Oh god, let this be it. CORONA puts the tape in the recorder and we hear a portion of the recorded interview.*)

CORONA'S RECORDED VOICE. Just one more quick question. Tell me, do you remember where you were when man first walked on the moon?

CORONA. The worst part of this job is listening to my own voice.

INTERVIEW 1—WOMAN'S VOICE. Let's see. Well of course I do. While man walked on the moon, I stayed up all night wallpapering the bathroom.

CORONA. That's it!

INTERVIEW 1—WOMAN'S VOICE. It was a floral print. My kids were someplace else I guess. Anyway, I was alone. I worked right through till morning. To me it seemed like the beginning of something. We weren't just going to fight among ourselves down here. In our time we'd done something spectacular.

CORONA. I love her!

INTERVIEW 1—WOMAN'S VOICE. And remember how the city of Perth turned on its lights so Glenn could see them when he passed over at night? I remember thinking I'd like to go to Perth and meet those nuts who turned on their—
(CORONA shuts off the tape.)

CORONA. I didn't feel that way. When man landed on the moon and found out it was just a rock, I ate an entire Sara Lee Cheesecake all by myself.

(MARTHA enters walking backwards, pursued by THREE REPORTERS. She is wearing a blazer with a NASA logo, but looks less like a scientist than a movie star. From time to time she twists her hair nervously, but otherwise is calm.)

MARTHA. I've made my statement. Please.

CORONA. Here she comes. *(Testing the microphone, tapping it with her finger.)* Testing, one, two, three. Testing. I said, testing. What's the matter with this thing?

(Throughout the scene, the whole party moves across the stage in a

circle, the REPORTERS advancing on MARTHA and MARTHA backing off. CORONA remains off to one side fumbling with the microphone.)

REPORTER 1. Miss Howland, Miss Howland! How does it feel to be the first American woman slated to go into space alone?

MARTHA. Accurate. Intriguing. A little like my first marathon race.

REPORTER 2. Do you have any message for the women of America?

MARTHA. Don't call me, I'll call you.

CORONA (*still working on the microphone*). What did she say?

MARTHA. Actually, I don't think of myself as a woman going into space, I think of myself as an American...a Floridian—

REPORTER 3 (*interrupting*). Are you worried about the effects of radiation on your reproductive organs?

MARTHA (*smiles tolerantly*). I have no immediate plans for using my reproductive organs, if that's what you're asking.

REPORTER 3. You won't be having any children?

MARTHA. No. Maybe. None of your business.

REPORTER 1. How do you answer critics of the space program?

MARTHA. I try not to use any big words. No, seriously, as a citizen of the twentieth century: What else is there worth doing?

REPORTER 2. Explain the purpose of your mission, Ms. Howland.

MARTHA. I'll be testing the new one-man vehicle which will eventually be part of Spacelab. I'll also be photographing stars and comets with our new laser equipment.

REPORTER 3. Do you see this flight as a major step forward for women?

MARTHA. Not particularly. NASA has always selected the person best qualified for the job.

REPORTER 1. Your mission is designated Artemis 1. Would you comment on the significance of that?

MARTHA. Significance? She was Mercury's sister, I believe.

REPORTER 1. Wasn't it Apollo?

MARTHA. I don't see the relevance—

(CORONA rushes up, breaking in.)

CORONA. Martha—Ms. Howland—Martha...

REPORTER 3. Have you gotten any advice from Sally Ride?

MARTHA. I don't really know her.

CORONA *(interrupting)*. Have you talked to Jean Cross?

MARTHA. Who? We don't all live in the same house, you know.

CORONA. Ms. Howland, the women of America are very proud of you. Very, very proud. Not since Jean Cross blazed the trail for women in space—

MARTHA. *(interrupting)*. Do you have a question?

CORONA. Yes. Do you have a message for the women of America?

MARTHA. I've already...well, all I can say is that it's too bad America isn't to the point yet where...

(JEAN enters on her porch, reading aloud from a newspaper, finishing MARTHA's quote.)

JEAN ...where the country could just send up a woman and nobody would think twice about it. *(Looking up from the paper.)* She's young, isn't she? *(Reading again.)* Martha

Howland, 28-year-old native of Florida, becomes the first woman astronaut to fly a solo mission in this historic blah, blah, blah... *(Raising a bottle of beer to the sky in a salute.)* Here's to you, Martha. *(Reading again.)* A scientist? Looks more like a Wheaties commercial. How the hell is a Ph.D gonna help her if she can't land the damn thing? *(Raising her bottle again, quietly and sincerely.)* Here's mud in your eye, Martha.

(JEAN remains onstage, moving to the lawn chair on the porch. While JEAN is talking the reporters leave. CORONA drops a notebook on her way out and re-enters to retrieve it.)

CORONA. Ms. Howland, one last question. What do you remember about the day Neil Armstrong landed on the moon? Where were you?

MARTHA *(thinking a moment)*. It was the summer I started running. I must have been about twelve years old. I'm sorry, but the press conference is over.

CORONA. Of course. Thank you. Wonderful to meet you. Good luck. Thank you. *(CORONA exits. MARTHA, who has been smiling like a beauty queen, drops her head into her hands.)*

(ANNE enters.)

ANNE. Excuse me, Ms. Howland. I wanted to wish you luck.

MARTHA. Please, I can't give any more interviews today.

ANNE. Oh, I'm not a reporter. *(She extends her hand.)* Anne Lester—I worked on the design of the shuttle. I'm with a private firm now—Inner Space Inc.

MARTHA. Yes, I've heard of it.

ANNE. Our first project might be of special interest to you. We're planning an orbital mission to the moon with an all-woman crew—including artists and writers. We're just beginning to select the team.

MARTHA. How did you get in here?

ANNE. Bob Lewiston is an old friend of mine. I'd love to talk to you about this sometime.

MARTHA. Look, NASA has treated me very well. I just couldn't be less interested.

CLAIRE (*offstage*). Martha, Martha!

(*CLAIRE enters.*)

CLAIRE. There you are.

MARTHA. Claire, would you see this woman out.

ANNE. Hello, Claire.

CLAIRE. Nice to see you again, Anne. I'm afraid Martha's very tired.

ANNE. It's all right, Claire. I can show myself out. Have an enlightening flight. (*ANNE exits. MARTHA begins to do stretching exercises and changes into her running clothes.*)

CLAIRE. Imagine! Showing her face around here.

MARTHA. Did she really help design the shuttle?

CLAIRE. Oh, she's very talented. Very ambitious. I guess I'm old-fashioned enough to believe in loyalty.

MARTHA. She's pushing that old thing about artists in space. Dropping Lewiston's name to impress me. (*Looks at the card.*) Something about an all-woman crew. (*She tucks the card into her suit.*)

CLAIRE. Martha, we need to go over the press conference.

MARTHA. Make it quick, Claire. I've got to run—every night at six. Remember?

CLAIRE. It looked like it was hard on you.

MARTHA (*excited*). All four networks were there. The *New York Times*. I'd estimate one hundred reporters.

CLAIRE (*consulting a clipboard*). Eighty-six.

MARTHA. A few wanted to follow me home.

CLAIRE. You're a star.

MARTHA. What a humiliating way to make a living.

CLAIRE. Martha.

MARTHA. No, I mean reporters. They feed off other people's accomplishments.

CLAIRE. Most of us do.

MARTHA. I kept forgetting what I couldn't say and what you told me to be sure to say. All those flashbulbs going off in my eyes.

CLAIRE. You did very well, Martha. Very well.

MARTHA. Did I look all right?

CLAIRE. You looked very well, Martha. I think next time we'll pin your hair back. We like you looking glamorous but it will help keep you from twisting your hair—it's very distracting.

MARTHA. Did I do that? It's such a habit with me.

CLAIRE. You were nervous.

MARTHA. Everyone I've ever known could have been watching. (*To herself*.) Charlie Beech could have been watching.

CLAIRE. I think we'll try a darker shade of lipstick next time. Who?

MARTHA. Ten years ago I wasn't enough fun for him.

CLAIRE. You really did very well, Martha. But, just between the two of us, you let them get to you.

MARTHA. They shouldn't be allowed to ask personal questions. (*Mocking*.) "Do you cry when something goes wrong in the spacecraft?"

CLAIRE. Just don't answer. We don't grade you on how many you answer, you know.

MARTHA. I wasn't aware that I was being graded at all. Hey, what's on that clipboard? Come on, let me see it.

CLAIRE (*keeping it away from her*). Just an expression.

MARTHA. It's mine, Claire. Does that make sense? I don't want anyone taking credit for it. Not my father, or M.I.T., or least of all the women of America. I'm a scientist, on a scientific mission. The fact that I'm a woman shouldn't enter into this.

CLAIRE. You've had a difficult day.

MARTHA. Claire, I want you to cancel the post-flight press conference.

CLAIRE. Now, Martha.

MARTHA. I'll speak to Bob about it if you need his okay.

CLAIRE. I'm the only one who can make that decision. Martha, I pushed hard for you to get this assignment. I told them you'd be good with the press. I was impressed with your poise and self-control.

MARTHA. Poise! Can I get that in writing? I might want to open a charm school when I get back.

CLAIRE. You will do the press conference. You are still an employee of NASA.

MARTHA. That sounds like a threat.

CLAIRE. I never make threats. Martha, dear, look at it this way: Such a move would be extremely harmful to your career.

MARTHA. It is a threat.

CLAIRE. It's not wise to peak so young. You'll want to go up a second time, now won't you?

MARTHA. All right—set up the interviews. Set up a hundred. I'll learn to be above average at this, too. (*A la Eliza Dolittle.*) The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain.

CLAIRE. Martha, I want you to show the whole world—that's why I'm being hard on you now. You did, well, a fine job with

the press today. How can I put this? I don't want you to be yourself. The world needs reassurance. So be dull. Smile as much as is humanly possible and don't give them anything they can use.

MARTHA. I know. Tell them what you eat for breakfast but not who you eat it with.

CLAIRE. Exactly. If you get nervous, put your hands in your pockets.

MARTHA. When I get nervous, I recite the Presidents backwards. I can do it in under a minute.

CLAIRE. Don't try to be witty. A woman can't pull it off with the press. And when you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Don't try to fake it.

MARTHA. You mean the Artemis thing? So I got one wrong.

CLAIRE. You didn't seem to know about Jean Cross.

MARTHA. Do you?

CLAIRE. Yes. She was an extraordinary pilot in her day. Almost our first woman astronaut.

MARTHA. I guess I do remember hearing something about her. The fact remains, I'm the first woman to actually solo.

CLAIRE. Simply say: I don't know.

MARTHA. I hate to say: I don't know.

CLAIRE. That's because you're young. But sometimes even Martha Howland doesn't know what she's talking about. Now, go have your run and then do some celebrating. I imagine the others are waiting for you.

MARTHA. Waiting to get me, maybe. They hate me. Nobody's admitting that, of course. I wouldn't handle the disappointment any better.

CLAIRE. It's your job to be better. (*MARTHA begins to leave.*)