

THESE SHINING LIVES

ABOUT THE PLAY

These Shining Lives is based on a true story – ordinary working women who were poisoned in the course of their employment during the 1920's and 30's (their job was to draw numbers onto watch faces with radium paint) and who fought with courage and tenacity to bring their employers to justice. Though the women are dying, theirs is a story of survival in its most transcendent sense, as they refuse to allow the company that stole their health to kill their spirits – or endanger the lives of those who come after them. It's a challenging, demanding play for both male and female actors. The play comprises twenty scenes that flow seamlessly and fluidly together, though we will add in an intermission.

FEMALE ROLES

All four actresses need to be able to perform comedy and tragedy equally well. Their early scenes together are all quick-witted banter and high-energy humor – but each woman also plays a scene in which she is diagnosed with a terminal illness and has to face the imminent reality of her own death. All four women are brave, strong, spirited heroines. They are a close-knit group and the chemistry between their different personalities is hugely important.

Catherine (age 18-29)

Catherine is the audience's Everywoman in the play, their way into the story – she narrates directly to the audience and is in every scene in the play, requiring a huge amount of stamina. A significant part of the play examines the relationship between Catherine and her husband Tom, and how their loving partnership is affected first by her decision to work at all, later by her initial worries about her health, and finally by her diagnosis and her decision to go to court. She is by turns gutsy, scared, resolute, affectionate, intimate – and always likeable. She has several monologues delivered on stage alone, so the actress will need to have a commanding stage presence. Given the fluidity of the play, she also needs to be able to switch quickly between scenes, settings and emotions smoothly and convincingly.

Charlotte (20s-30s)

If these Radium Girls are the Pink Ladies, Charlotte is the Rizzo character. She is fast-talking, fast-living, bold, funny, cynical and wild – yet with perhaps the most sensitive soul of all the women hidden inside her brash exterior; a sensitivity she only sometimes lets show. Sings a Radium jingle.

Pearl (20s-30s) / Reporter

Pearl is the joker of the group (literally: she has a passion for 'knock, knock' jokes). She is sweet, friendly, and eager to please. A bit of a giggler, she comes across as the youngest of the girls and has a hard time coming to terms with her developing illness. Sings a radium jingle. **Reporter-** Speaks outside of the courthouse during Catherine's lawsuit. Provides the opinion of the public.

Frances (20s-30s) / Reporter

Frances is the 'moral backbone' of the women. While she is more serious and reserved than the others, she also has a very dry sense of humor and a big heart, and she is well-loved and well-respected by her friends. In fact, she acts as a mediator during the beginning of the show between Charlotte and Catherine. Sings a Radium jingle. **Reporter-** Speaks outside of the courthouse during Catherine's lawsuit. Provides the opinion of the public.

MALE ROLES

Tom (20s-30s)

Tom is married to Catherine. This is a role demanding huge range from an actor, as Tom needs to express the full gamut of emotions, from injured male pride (when his wife first starts to work – and earns more than him) to overwhelming love; terrified fear to heartbreaking grief; murderous anger to burning passion. Tom should demonstrate real chemistry with the actor who plays Catherine.

Mr Reed (30's and up) / Radio Announcer

Mr Reed is the foreman of Radium Dial, the company where the women work. His heart is usually with the girls, but when put under pressure he is a pawn of the Radium Dial factory and has to follow orders. The **radio announcer** is a slick and smarmy radio DJ, with more than a hint of high-end used-car salesman about him.

Leonard Grossman (30's and up)/company doctor

These parts require a very versatile actor, as they're quite different. **Leonard Grossman**, attorney at law, is the take-no-prisoners lawyer who agrees to represent the women in court. He is a showman: charismatic, confident, dominating the stage with huge energy. He is an impassioned socialist and a brilliant lawyer, as well as a frank realist; he's quick-witted and fast-talking, yet also kind. He takes the case because it's the right thing to do, not to make money. The **Company doctor** denies anything is wrong with Catherine at all, toeing the company line. He should provoke a feeling of untrustworthiness and portentousness, even while his words are seemingly intended to reassure.

Dr Dalitsch (30's and up)/Dr. Roundtree/ Judge

The actor portraying these three characters will need to work hard to create three different personalities. **Dr. Dalitsch** is the one doctor who is honest with the women, and he is the one who delivers the diagnosis that they will die because of the radium poisoning. He is blunt yet kind, a good soul. His presence changes the energy in the play. **Dr Rowntree** is a kind of early 'TV doctor', more concerned with his appearance on the cover of the latest medical journal and the sound of his own voice than with scientific fact. The **Judge** is in the courtroom scene.