



Published on *DOE Blog* (<http://blog.energy.gov>)

[Home](#) > Radiancance: Science and Stagecraft Come Together via Alan Alda and Marie Curie

Radiancance: Science and Stagecraft Come Together via Alan Alda and Marie Curie

By *April Saylor*

Created 05/27/2011 - 1:30pm

Submitted by [Charles Rousseaux](#) [1] on May 27, 2011 - 1:30pm

They might appear to have little in common. She received two Nobel Prizes. He won six Emmys. She was born in Poland and made her name in Paris. He was born in New York City, and made his fame in Hollywood.

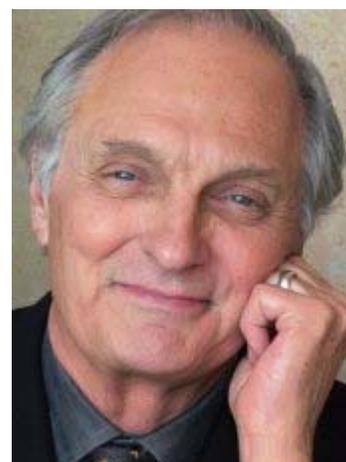
Despite their differences, Marie Curie and Alan Alda will be coming together on opening night of the upcoming World Science Festival, through a special reading of his first play, *Radiancance: The Passion of Marie Curie*.

Mr. Alda -- who recently visited the Department of Energy to discuss the importance of promoting a greater public understanding of science -- was kind enough to answer a few questions about his upcoming play and efforts in science communications. The interview is below:

Question: Why did you find the story of Marie Curie so compelling -- what did you discover about her that surprised you, and what do you hope people will take out of your play?

Alan Alda: Marie Curie's story is really one of passion, emotion and intellectual adventure. She's my hero. She never gave up, no matter how hard it was to fight her way through the unknown to an understanding of nature that was revolutionary, and through the most suffocating kinds of bias against women and foreigners. When the going got tough, as it does when you're writing, I was always pulled through by remembering how she never quit. She actually gave me strength.

Q: You have incredible talents participating in the production -- Maggie Gyllenhaal and Mireille Enos, Liev Schreiber and David Morse among others. How did they react to playing science figures, to connecting stagecraft to science?



Alan Alda | Courtesy of www.alanalda.com [2]

AA: We haven't rehearsed yet. It will be a one-time reading, but it should be a spectacular evening. These are great actors, who I think are drawn together, partly because they all want the pleasure of acting with one another, but also to tell Marie's story, which is such a powerful one. I'm excited and looking forward to hearing them become these people.

Q: Can you tempt us with any hints about the play -- suggestions of anything that might surprise or delight?

AA: There's romance, drama, science and even laughter in the play. For someone who doesn't know her story, one of the surprising things about her is that someone actually threatened to kill her.

Q: Will you be putting the play on a traveling schedule to D.C.?

AA: After this one time reading at the World Science Festival gala, the next step will be a run at the Geffen Playhouse in LA in the fall.

Q: Do you see any parallels between stagecraft and science?

AA: They're both rigorous (not just any word will do, and in comedy milliseconds count). And they both require creativity. Science, of course, can be tested objectively, and that's a pretty big difference.

Q: How did you get interested in science, and why have you pursued it?

AA: I've always been interested in science in a way. I was an amateur inventor as a boy and would make models and drawings of my inventions. And I've always been curious about how things got the way they are. Don't you always wonder when you get in an elevator who put the panel with all the buttons on it in the wall? And where all the cables and wires go?

Q: So many people see science as doing -- working on an experiment or analyzing a finding -- yet you've observed, "Communication is not something extra you add on to science. It is the essence of science." What do you mean?

AA: From everything I've read about science, I don't understand how it could be done without scientists' accurately communicating with other scientists. But for something new and original to catch fire, I think it may need more than accuracy alone. I think good communication involves, first of all, clarity. A thing can be accurate and totally unclear. Read, for instance, almost any electronics manual. I think it needs to be both clear and vivid. And, of course, there's a lot more to it than that. Don't get me started. I revere the scientists who are really good science communicators. I want to see more of them.

Q: How do you bridge the gap between making something scientifically accurate and making it compelling?



Marie Curie | Courtesy of NobelPrize.org ^[3]

AA: I've worked hard to make the science in *Radiance* as accurate as possible, and I'm always grateful when a scientist can help me make it even clearer. But I try not to have a single line of science (or anything else) in the play that isn't dramatic, moving the story forward by having a character actively trying to achieve his or her objective.

Q: Can you tell us a bit about your work at Stony Brook's Center for Communicating Science?

AA: We're providing workshops where scientists can learn the skills of good communication as part of their education in science. This has been a dream of mine and it thrills me that young scientists are oversubscribing the courses, which are offered for credit. They work on various kinds of writing skills in presenting their work to the public and there's an innovative workshop in improvisation that helps them be far more comfortable presenting their work in person to an audience.

Q: Why is promoting greater public understanding of science so important to you?

AA: I guess partly because I think our lives depend on it. If the public doesn't learn to ask the right questions we'll make a lot of wrong policy decisions. But also, because as a culture, if we have no way to experience science, we're missing so much that's beautiful and exciting. Imagine a culture that knew how to become rich but never heard of Mozart, or if they did, couldn't stand to listen to him. Isn't it just as weird to live in a world where people think science is for the nerdy?

For more information about *Radiance* -- including ticket information -- please go to: <http://worldsciencefestival.com/gala> [4]. For additional information on Stony Brook's Center for Communicating Science, check out: <http://www.centerforcommunicatingscience.org/> [5]. And for more information on the DOE Office of Science, please go to: <http://www.science.energy.gov/> [6].

Charles Rousseaux is a Senior Writer in the Office of Science.

[Charles Rousseaux](#) [1] [Chemical Sciences](#) [7] [Material Science](#) [8] [Science Education](#) [9]
[Charles Rousseaux](#) [Chemical Sciences](#) [Material Science](#) [Science Education](#)

Source URL: <http://blog.energy.gov/blog/2011/05/27/radiance-science-and-stagecraft-come-together-alan-alda-and-marie-curie>

Links:

[1] <http://blog.energy.gov/category/behalf/charles-rousseau>

[2] <http://www.alanalda.com/>

[3] http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/chemistry/laureates/1911/marie-curie.html

[4] <http://worldsciencefestival.com/gala>

[5] <http://www.centerforcommunicatingscience.org/>

[6] <http://www.science.energy.gov/>

[7] <http://blog.energy.gov/category/blog-taxonomy/chemical-sciences>

[8] <http://blog.energy.gov/category/blog-taxonomy/material-science>

[9] <http://blog.energy.gov/category/blog-taxonomy/science-education>