"These Shining Lives" Opens at USU Eastern | Eastern

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Elley Cowdell
(Price) plays Catherine Donohue with Jennifer Lopez
(Price) playing Charlotte Purcell in USU Eastern’s
production of “These Shining Lives”.

Dramatizing the danger women faced in the 1920s
workforce is the premise of USU Eastern’s production of
“These Shining Lives” opening the weekends of Dec. 5-7
and 12-14, in the Central Instructional Building Black Box
Theater at 7:30 p.m.

Written by Melanie Marnich, These Shining Lives show
women getting a chance to work at a well-paying job in
the 1920s and early 1930s, which was uncharacteristic for
the time in the United States.

The job, which seems easy enough for the main
characters, is hand painting the hour markings onto
different sized watch dials using a radium compound which
glows in the dark. The women were paid 8 cents for each
watch dial they painted which was more money than most
their husbands made.

The owners of Radium Dial, the company that hires the
women to do the painting, tells them there is no evidence
that radium is harmful and provides scientific evidence of
its health benefits. Located in Ottawa, Ill., the company
employed 1,000 women who turned out about 4,300 dials
each day in the ‘20s and ‘30s.

Within a few years, workers notice their hands start
glowing in the dark, but assume it is just from the radium
powder used to paint the clock faces. The women develop
ailments, including jaw infections and bone pain, but
several local doctors tell them that all they need is aspirin,
which of course does not help. They become sick and
cannot go to work, so eventually get fired.

After years of search, they find a doctor willing to put his
name on the line and diagnose the women with radium
poisoning. This helps the four-main characters decide to
file a lawsuit against Radium Dial.

An attorney, Leonard J. Grossman, agrees to take their
case for free. The case goes all the way to the Supreme
Court.

This production is above and beyond what any of the
actors have done before. They cranked up their skills to
another whole degree, said stage manager Christopher
Vlamakis.

The plot can come across as sad and somber, but in
reality, it is the story of hope and friendship. “It has love,
happiness and a lot of joking around in it,” Vlamakis said.
“Plus the type of sadness is not the kind that lingers and
the ‘sisterhood’ that is developed by the women is real. It’s
perfect, touching and wistful. . .beautifully tragic.”

Directing the play is Morgan Lund, professional actor,
writer, producer, director, teacher and artist for the
past 36 years. With strong union affiliations, he has
worked with LORT Theatres, film, television, radio, print,
small business, corporate America, world-class opera
and orchestras, dance companies, theme parks and
universities across the United States.

Besides experience in all aspects of theatre, Lund brings
a different point of view for the actors. He lived in the
Ottawa, Ill., area and connected “life and feelings” to the
story from the generations of people who still live there.

These Shining Lives cast includes Elley Cowdell,
Carbonville; Jennifer Lopez, Carbonville; CheyAnn
Needles, Cedar City; Aubrey Jorgensen, Price; Hunter
Peterson, Gunnison; and Stephen Ewan, Price.

USU Eastern theatre assistant professor, Brent Innes
produces the production as well as designed the set, props
and sound. Hongji (Joy) Zhu designed and sewed the
costumes with Curtis Nakai as her assistant.

USU Eastern Theatre Box Office