

The Cambridge First All-Ladies Fire Brigade

Wellcome Genome Campus
1st of October



The Cambridge First All-Ladies Fire Brigade

Cast

Hertha Marks/Ayrton - Maddison Bulleyment

Annie Russell/Maunder - Al Knott

Charlotte Scott - Lauren Somerville

Ida Freund - Eliza Waters

Ethel Sargant - Rebecca Bailey

Creative team

Director - Lucy Jane Atkinson

Musical Director - Gigi Kuo

Lyrics - Helen Arney

Book - Brian Mackenwells

Music - Jenni Pinnock

About the show

Physicist. Inventor. Activist.

It's time to meet the most significant British scientist you've never heard of, born just 20 miles away from here.

Follow Hertha Ayrton and four of her groundbreaking friends as they study at 1880s Girton College, Cambridge.

When fire threatens their College, Hertha gathers an unlikely crew to start the world's first all-female fire brigade. Struggling against the elements – and sexism – in Cambridge, they soon realise there's a bigger blaze to fight: for their right to equal education, to work, and to vote.

Even if it means starting a few fires themselves...

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Songs

Overture: The Climb

A Room Of My Own

Time To See This Through

Put Out The Fire

Choir Practice

Fire Drills

Hundred and First

It's Not Right

What We Deserve

Fire!

One Rung At A Time

The Tripos

Scott On The Board

Shape Of Things

The Time Is Now

Let It Burn

We Are The Cambridge First

All-Ladies Fire Brigade

Fire Brigade

Hertha Marks/Ayrton Maddison Bulleyment



Theatre credits include: The Witches (National Theatre), 42 Balloons (Lowry Manchester, WhatsOnStage Awards), Bridges of Madison County (Menier Chocolate Factory), Six the Musical (Original UK Tour Cast), Fly More Than You Fall (Southwark Playhouse Elephant), Public (Vault Festival), Jack and the Beanstalk (Lyric Hammersmith), Babies (West End Live), Cambridge First All-Ladies Fire Brigade (New Musicals Showcase Birmingham Hippodrome 2025, and Summer Science Festivals 2026).

Cast Recordings include: The Witches (National Theatre), 42 Balloons EP, Babies the Musical EP

Audio includes: Voicing numerous characters for Doctor Who Audio Series with Big Finish Productions, working alongside Jodie Whittaker, Christopher Eccleston, Paul McGann.

Training: Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Maddison has had a brilliant Summer performing with the team at Science festivals across the country, and is thrilled to be back again!

@maddieroseb

Annie Russell/Maunder Al Knott



Theatre Credits include Raven in Dark of the Moon (Charing Cross Theatre), Greaseball in the original 2024/25 London cast of Starlight Express (Troubadour Wembley Park Theatre) and Harlow in Midnight at the Palace (Gilded Balloon - Edinburgh Fringe).

Workshop Credits: Starlight Express (development phase).

Training: Arts Educational

While training, Al was awarded the Ian Fleming Musical Theatre Award in 2023.

Fire Brigade

Charlotte Scott
Lauren Somerville



Theatre credits include: Betty (actor-musician, bass guitar) in Vinegar Tom (OVO St. Albans), Super Swing (Universal Studios Japan), Cinderella in Cinderella's Wellies (The Point, Eastleigh).

Training: Trinity Laban Conservatoire

Lauren is thrilled to be a part of this production and has thoroughly enjoyed learning about these exceptional women and bringing their story to life!

Ida Freund
Eliza Waters



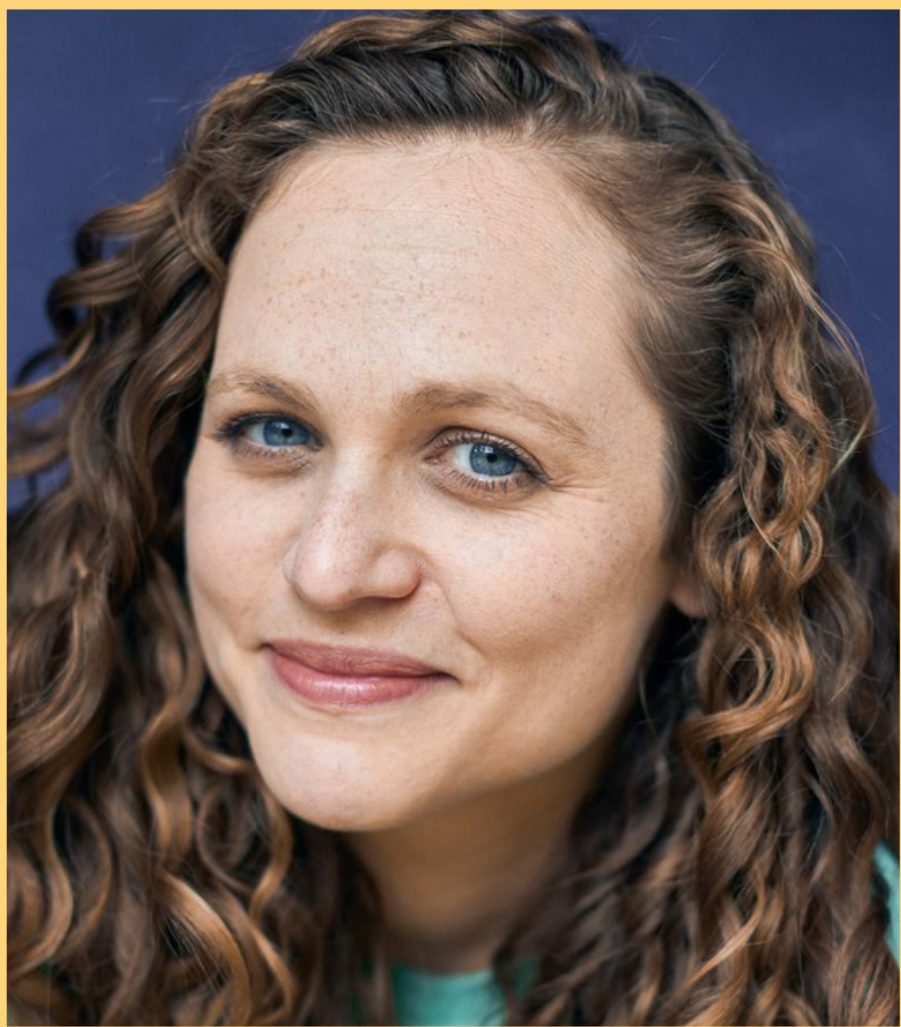
Theatre credits include Heathers (The Other Palace), Nativity the Musical (Birmingham REP), Miss Littlewood and Boundless as the Sea with the RSC aboard the Queen Mary 2, as well as various pantos at Wolverhampton Grand, Leamington Spa and Crewe Lyceum.

Eliza performed excerpts of this show with Leading Voices London, a showcase of new British Musical Theatre with a professional choir.

Training - Royal Academy of Music (MA in Musical Theatre) where she was awarded a Disney Scholarship and was awarded Highly Comended at the Toni V Fell Prize.

Fire Brigade

Ethel Sargant Rebecca Bailey



Roles include Elizabeth in No Finer Life (National Tour); Woman 1 (Multi-Role) in Tomorrow, Maybe a new musical by Amies & Clements (Edinburgh Fringe & Bridge House Theatre); Hedgehog in Hedgehogs & Porcupines (Old Red Lion & Stockwell Playhouse). With leading children's company Full House Theatre; Polly in The Elves and the Shoemaker; Mum/Duck/Hippo in Big Red Bath - with Half Moon Theatre; Carole in The Night Before Christmas; Mum/Velma, The Snow Dog (Edinburgh Fringe); Josie in A Christmas Carol; Rose in Beauty and the Beast.

Rebecca has performed in many new MT concerts including; Showtime (The Stage Door/ACJ Productions), The Barn Presents: The Music Of Amies & Clements (The Barn Theatre); All That Scratch - MT Scratch Night, (The Other Palace), Signal - Redefining New British Music Theatre (The Hospital Club). Rebecca is also currently writing a new musical adaptation of 5 Children & the It with Aardvarks Can't Jump Productions.

@beckylou1225
@aardvarkscantjump

Musical Director Gigi Kuo



Gigi is a professional musician working as a musical director, keys player, pianist, accompanist and singer-performer. She has an array of experience in performing arts, including theatre, classical music and ballet.

She holds both bachelor and master degrees in piano performance, training at National Taiwan University of Arts and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She has a heightened passion in education and has been working with children and young adults for over 10 years as a music teacher at schools as well as teaching singing and piano.

Alongside her continuing teaching, Gigi works as a freelance musical director and accompanist/pianist across drama schools and in the West End. She was the first music intern at The Lion King (London) and she is now one of the rehearsal pianists.

Recent theatre credits include 9 to 5 UK Tour (AMD/Keys 2), The Harder They Come (Keys 1), Nativity! The Musical (MD/Keys), Wizard of Oz (AMD/Keys 2), Avenue Q in Concert (AMD/Keys 2).

Fire Brigade

Director

Lucy Jane Atkinson



Lucy is an award-winning director and dramaturg who specializes in new writing. A graduate of LAMDA's Post Graduate Director's course, and a member of the National Theatre's Directors course. In 2018 she was named number 1 on The Stage's "Top Talents To Watch". She has been scouted to direct new plays on both sides of the Atlantic, and has won awards for her work on multiple continents. Lucy was the New Work Resident Director at the National Theatre for 2025.

Selected credits as Director: Barriers (National Theatre), A Hundred Words For Snow (Trafalgar Studios, Winner: Offie Best Actress. Nominated: Offie Best Director, Best New Play), The Sleeping Sword (Watermill Theatre), Spy For Spy (Riverside Studios), Testament (ViaBrooklyn, New York, Winner: BroadwayWorld Best Director 2022), Meat (Theatre503), Girls & Boys (Crow's Theatre, Toronto), A Great Big Woolly Mammoth Thawing From The Ice, I & You (Burning Coal, North Carolina), The Enchantment (HERE Arts Centre, New York). As Staff Director: Middle (National Theatre).



We'd like to thank...

Mayflower Studios and the British Science Festival for their generous support. They have enabled us to create this new concert version of the show.

We'd also like to thank Birmingham Hippodrome, Lincoln Arts Centre, University of Lincoln, Institute of Physics and the British Society for History of Science. Their support has been a vital part of the show's development over the last few years.

Eternal thanks go to our creative champions Clare Chandler, Tim Sutton, Victoria Saxton and Tricity Vogue. We wouldn't have found our brilliant cast without advice from Teddy Clements and Kevin Jones - Southampton is lucky to have these champions of new musical theatre!

Writers

Jenni, Helen and Brian came together in 2023 to write new musicals that shine a spotlight on history, science and trailblazing women.



Jenni Pinnock weaves stories, nature and science into music which is regularly performed both across the UK and around the world. Quirky time signatures and soaring melodies are punctuated by moments of quiet stillness and reflection, in projects that span from solo works to large scale collaborations across the arts. Working in both the contemporary classical and musical theatre worlds, her music can be found in student recitals, installed in replica Antarctic huts, in concert halls and on theatre stages.

Helen Arney is a songwriter, science comedian and recovering stand-up. You might have seen her explaining physics while riding a rollercoaster for BBC2, electrifying Sandi Toksvig on QI, singing the periodic table on Channel 4 News or touring with science comedy phenomenon “Festival of the Spoken Nerd”. She now writes musical theatre projects that often put complex women and science centre-stage. Helen’s great grandfather, Edgar Walford Marchant, knew Hertha Ayrton and was taught by her husband.

Brian Mackenwells is an Irish writer living in Oxford. Despite being quite tired, he has written for the BBC about pencils, told stories on stage about not getting sick in zero gravity, performed standup comedy about strange superheroes, and published children’s poetry. He spent five years co-writing a monthly audio drama “Action Science Theatre”. This multi award-entering podcast released 50 very silly adventure stories, including a live show, and was downloaded over 75,000 times.

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Development so far

Nov 2023 “Put Out The Fire” performed at London’s Cambridge Theatre.

Mar 2024 Selected for the first Birmingham Hippodrome “New Musical Theatre Writers Group”, with seed funding and 18 months of development.

Apr 2025 Selected as one of Lincoln Arts Centre’s “Innovate Artists”, with seed funding and support.

Jan-May 2026 R&D process at University of Lincoln. Full workshop production of the show, performed by second year students.

Jun 2026 Short family concerts at summer festivals, funded by the Institute of Physics.

Sep-Oct 2026 First performances of 90 minute concert version with cast of 5, supported by Mayflower Studios and the British Science Festival.



Hertha Ayrton: A Portrait in Three Protests



One of the central driving forces behind our version of Hertha is her powerful sense of justice. She has to do the right thing, whatever the cost. First she feels compelled to form a fire brigade to protect her new friends, then later in the show she starts a campaign for women at Cambridge to be awarded the same degrees as male students.

Taking on these all-consuming projects causes Hertha to sacrifice her health, her academic goals, and her family's hopes... but she does it anyway, because it's the right thing to do.

The real Hertha Ayrton also strived for justice. Here are three moments of protest from her life that helped us create our version of her on stage:

1. HUNGER STRIKES

Hertha's biographer Evelyn Sharp describes a time at school when Hertha was accused of some misbehaviour that she wasn't responsible for, but the teachers refused to believe her. To prove it, she came up with the idea of a hunger strike: *"For two-and-a-half days she came to every meal but steadily refused to touch food, until, both alarmed and convinced against their will of her innocence, her harassed elders had to give in and concede her point."*

2. BLACK FRIDAY AND WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE

Hertha was a committed member of the Women's Social and Political Union, the militant suffrage organisation behind the notorious "Black Friday" march on Parliament. Although she was never arrested herself, Hertha planned her scientific work around a possible spell in prison. Her biographer writes: *"Mrs. Ayrton's participation in the militant demonstrations of November, 1910, led to the postponement of her paper, 'On some new Facts connected with the Motion of Oscillating Water' as she fully expected to be in prison on November 21, the date on which she had engaged to read it before the Royal Society."*

3. MARIE CURIE AND MISINFORMATION

Hertha met fellow scientist, and discoverer of the element Radium, Marie Skłodowska-Curie, at the Royal Institution in June 1903. Marie sent Hertha an autographed copy of her PhD thesis on Radioactivity, and they became firm friends. Hertha wrote regularly to British newspapers to correct their reporting about Marie's scientific achievements, which were often attributed to her husband: *"Errors are notoriously hard to kill, but an error that ascribes to a man what was actually the work of a woman has more lives than a cat."*

Read the full blog at:
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