International Max Planck Research School for Astronomy and Astrophysics
at the Universities of Bonn and Cologne

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Tuesday, September 21, 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Subject: Talk by Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell: "Reflections on the discovery of pulsars" on October 21, 2010 at 18:00 in "Festsaal" of the main Bonn university building

The *International Max Planck Research School for Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Universities of Bonn and Cologne* operated by the *Max-Planck-Institut für Radioastronomie* is proud to announce the public talk by professor Jocelyn Bell Burnel on October 21, 2010 in "Festsaal" of the main University building, on "Reflections on the discovery of pulsars".

Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell, is one of the most distinguished figures in the field of astrophysics. In 1967 as a PhD student she discovered the first radio pulsar. This ground breaking discovery led to a Nobel Prize in 1974.

The distinct feature of this object was its extremely precise emission of radio signals (like a lighthouse) which forced the examination of several possible scenarios for their origin including even the hypothesis of extraterrestrial intelligence!

Nowadays, we nevertheless know that pulsars are extremely dense objects comprising the corpses of dead stars. They are typically as heavy as the Sun while they are spheres of only, 20 km across! These among several other properties make them clearly the latest stages of matter that modern physics can describe. Most importantly however, they provide probably the most promising tool for discovering the "holy grail" of modern astronomy: the gravitational waves.

Professor Bell will give a short account of the discovery of pulsars (pulsating radio stars) and recount some other instances where pulsars were nearly discovered. She will conclude with some reflections on the lessons that can be drawn from these stories.

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