

## **Variable Stars: Stepping Stones to Understanding the Universe (2011)**

The poet wrote, "*Bright star, would that I were as steadfast as thou art*". On close inspection, however, stars are not steadfast. They become brighter and fainter with time, they are variable. To their first discoverers, variable stars were "Wondrous" and "Mischief-makers", unnatural intrusions upon the starry sky.

Today, we know that nearly all stars are variable to some degree, yet they still elicit wonder in us. Some types of variable stars allow us to determine the size of our Galaxy and/or the age of the universe. Others are the sources of essential components for the making of our planet. They can even touch our lives - the study of variable stars allows ordinary citizens to enjoy the challenge and excitement of making significant contributions to science.

This presentation introduces some of the people who have discovered and studied variable stars, explains what makes some stars vary, and shows how the study of variable stars has changed our concept of the universe.