PREFACE

On Saturday, October 21, 2000, about two dozen astronomers gathered in the beautiful International Center of the University of California, Los Angeles, campus, for a meeting to celebrate Mirek Plavec's 75th birthday.

Some time before this date, the extremely enthusiastic response of all invited participants created a contagious mood of good spirits. The original organizers of the meeting, thus encouraged, changed the originally contemplated title "Interacting Stars: A meeting honoring Mirek Plavec" to "Interacting Astronomers: A symposium on Mirek's favorite stars".

Indeed, Mirek devoted most of his scientific life to studying interacting binary stars. Not surprisingly, most of the contributions of the workshop dealt with this particular topic. The talks were given in many instances by Mirek's former students. But Mirek is not only an expert in studying distant interactions. He promotes active interactions, this time between astronomers, and people in general. And he is very successful in that too. He is a widely respected and admired colleague, teacher, collaborator, and friend for many of us. He is a truly beloved professor at UCLA; he has even been elected one of the most popular professors (including all departments!) at the whole UCLA campus.

This spirit of interaction permeated the entire meeting. During the day, interactions between two stars, between a star and its environment, and even between a black hole and its surroundings, were presented and discussed. And, in the evening, many-particle interactions between Mirek, his family, and friends, were the main theme during the honorary reception (although interactions between participants and complex organic compounds, known as food and drinks, were also present). At the end of the evening several colleagues shared with us memories of their life-long interaction with Mirek, and, as a grand finale, Mirek, in his typical style, told a series of wonderful stories, mostly personal, and in many cases the characters were present at the dinner.

All these aspects are reflected in these Proceedings – the written part contains the contributions presented during the meeting, while the accompanying photos testify to the overall good spirits present at the evening honorary reception.

The meeting was organized jointly by Matt Malkan from the Department of Astronomy at UCLA, and Ivan Hubeny from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. We have been skillfully assisted by the Local Organizing Committee, especially by Ms. Nalini Saba and Laurie Liles.

Ivan Hubeny and Matt Malkan
Greenbelt and Los Angeles, May 2001

The photographs reproduced here were obtained during the honorary banquet by Andrea Johnson and Mary Jo Robertson who kindly agreed with their publication.