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--- PRESS RELEASE ---

**7 FEARLESS WOMEN, 7 UNFORGETTABLE STORIES
THE TABARD THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS A WORLD PREMIERE!**

MORE THAN PETTICOATS

Inspired by the book
MORE THAN PETTICOATS: Remarkable California Women
by Erin H. Turner

September 7-15, 2007

SAN JOSE, Calif. (6 August, 2007): The Tabard Theatre Company opens its 7th season on September 7th with the world premiere of **MORE THAN PETTICOATS**, the story of 7 women who had a significant impact on the history of California in its first 100 years of statehood. A total of ten performances will be presented at the **Triton Hall Pavilion** in Santa Clara through **September 15, 2007**, concluding with that evening's performance.

MORE THAN PETTICOATS, inspired by Erin H. Turner's book, *MORE THAN PETTICOATS: Remarkable California Women*, is the **first of three new productions** Tabard is premiering in celebration of its seventh season. "The theme this season is '7-year itch – itch for something new'," says managing artistic director Cathy Spielberger Cassetta. "We decided to create three new theatre pieces rather than stage existing material. It's very exciting to be part of not just one but three new works. **MORE THAN PETTICOATS** is the perfect play to launch our ground-breaking, history-making season as the play is about seven ground-breaking, history-making women."

MORE THAN PETTICOATS enacts **significant moments** in the lives of **seven California women** whose independent choices laid the foundation and often served as the catalyst for change in the state. The women portrayed include architect **Julia Morgan**, naturalist and author **Mary Austin**, photographer **Dorothea Lange**, back-room political force **Jessie Benton Frémont**, Chinese translator Tye Leung Schultze, Indian

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mediator Toby Winema Riddle, and the “mother of **civil rights** in California,” Mary Ellen Pleasant.

The lives of these women were hugely diverse, and together spanned more than a century, from the early 1800s to the mid-1960s. **Their backgrounds** ranged from educated to self-taught, from wealthy to poor; all were resourceful, independent, passionate, and driven. Whether helping freed slaves achieve financial autonomy, mediating an Indian war, assisting Chinese immigrants through Angel Island, or memorably documenting the world they saw, all seven shared a common determination to make a difference and the courage to fight the status quo. Through their individual experiences, each of them made a unique contribution to history that defines the California we know and often take for granted. **MORE THAN PETTICOATS** offers the audience a view of each woman’s life, filled with its challenges and choices as well as victories and verdicts.

The **birth of the play’s script** has been the remarkable result of Tabard’s collaborative culture. Seasoned actors and directors contributed research and scripting for one or more of the women. Cassetta, herself, handled the Julia Morgan and Mary Ellen Pleasant scenes; Jenny Hollingworth, the play’s director, took on Mary Austin; Andrew Ceglio did the same for Toby Winema Riddle; Joanne Engelhardt for Jessie Benton Frémont; Irene Trapp for Tye Leung Schultze; and Leslie Hardy Tamel for Dorothea Lange. Interestingly, Engelhardt will portray Frémont in the production, Tamel will play Lange, and Ceglio, one of three male actors in the production, will play the young male characters in the lives of the seven women. The process has resulted in a personal journey, allowing the participating actors to give a unique voice to the characters they are portraying.

Commenting on what it is like to be involved with a production from inception, **Joanne Engelhardt, who plays Jessie Benton Frémont**, the political force behind her husband, says, "This is the first time I've ever been so deeply involved in the initial research of and dialogue writing for my character, Jessie Benton Frémont. She was an amazingly strong woman who, if living today, might give Hillary a run for her money in a presidential race! Now I get to bring her to life onstage - that's a real thrill."

Ruth E. Stein, who will be portraying naturalist and author Mary Austin, observes that “**PETTICOATS is ‘being built from the hemline up’** by a team of folks dedicated to bringing these ladies to life. I feel a great responsibility to honestly ‘be’ Mary Austin. I am energized by the challenge of ‘getting into the skin’ of Mary Austin and helping

audiences feel her strength, determination, intelligence, and strong attitude in a world 'owned' by men."

Joining Ceglio in the cast to portray the other male characters are Doug Baird, who will play the older roles, and Justin Isaacson who will play a newsboy throughout the play, providing context and continuity for the intertwined stories.

Working with Cassetta to intertwine the stories of all the characters and shape the scenes into a cohesive theatrical presentation is local **playwright Doug Brook**. Eight of his plays have received stagings or awards at various theatres nationwide, including the 42nd Street Studios in New York City. "Of my seven or eight staged scripts, this is my first collaboration. Delving into the lives of these impressive women, and amalgamating the different voices that the various writers have brought to them, have both been fascinating."

In addition to having Erin H. Turner available as a resource, to ensure that the play and its dialogue ring true the **Tabard script collaborators** have contacted relatives, experts, and other authors of works about the seven women, including Lynn Forney MacMurray, Julia Morgan's goddaughter whose mother was Miss Morgan's secretary for thirty years; Mark A. Wilson who has a new book about Julia Morgan coming out in September; Debra Herrera, Toby Winema Riddle's great-granddaughter; Richard Lee, Tye Leung Schulze's son-in-law; and Steven Lassoff, a writer in Los Angeles who has written a screenplay about Mary Ellen Pleasant.

On Saturday, September 8, 11:00 am Tabard is hosting a **PETTICOATS Panel** at the Triton Hall Pavilion, featuring the author of the book, **Erin H. Turner**, Steven Lasoff, Mark A. Wilson, and playwright Doug Brook.

Directing the original script is British-born **Jenny Hollingworth**, who directed Tabard's much acclaimed production last season of MR. PIM PASSES BY. "Exploring the stories of these indomitable women has been fascinating. To an immigrant like myself; they represent all that is bold, brave and best in this New World. I knew little about any of them before we began, but I have learnt so much, both about their inspiring lives and also about the creative inspiration that comes from working collaboratively on this kind of project."

Cassetta has a particular reason for wanting Tabard to create and stage this particular play. She says, "Just as the women in **MORE THAN PETTICOATS** inspired others, Erin Turner has inspired many readers and Tabard through her book. It is Tabard's hope

that its audiences, too, will be inspired by the portrayal of these remarkable women and continue the **legacy of inspiration** to another generation."

In keeping with the company's commitment to donate a portion of its proceeds to a charity that is thematically related to the production, the cast and staff of **MORE THAN PETTICOATS** have chosen the **Girl Scouts of Santa Clara County** as its designated non-profit for the work they do to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place – not unlike the heroines of **MORE THAN PETTICOATS**.

During intermission of every performance, patrons will be able to flavor their theatrical experience with an old-fashioned **Ice Cream Social**.

A special "hands-on" **presentation for blind and visually impaired** patrons will be offered by cast and staff on Saturday, September 8, from 1:30pm – 2:00pm as part of Tabard's **Perspective Series**. Guide dogs are welcome for this presentation as well as for performances. Although the presentation is free, reservations are required.

MORE THAN PETTICOATS is The Tabard Theatre Company's first production of the 2007-2008 season. Two more World Premieres will complete the season: **STOP TIME!**, an innovative high-energy multi-media revue of 20th century music presented in December, and **PANDEMONIUM**, a unique take on the tale of Pandora's Box in April 2008.

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PHOTO: [Leslie Hardy Tamel as famed California photographer Dorothea Lange](#), one of the 7 remarkable women portrayed in The Tabard Theatre Company's production of **MORE THAN PETTICOATS**. Lange used her camera to document the present, giving a face to the past and perspective for those in the future. Her photos of the Great Depression and Internment of Japanese-Americans in California personalized the anguish of those periods of California history.

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