

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**“Men on Boats” Takes the ‘Man’ Out of Manifest Destiny**  
*Jaclyn Backhaus’ Rollicking History Pageant Plays at The Western Stage*

[SALINAS, Calif. Oct. 9] – The Western Stage voyages into the untamed American West with “Men on Boats” by Jaclyn Backhaus. Spinning historical, theatrical, and gender conventions on their heads, this subversive tale of 10 men, four boats, and two rivers contains none of the above. Pack your gear for the true history of 19th-century American explorer and one-armed Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell, who assembles a brawny band of soldiers, trappers, and adventurers to explore the waterways of the American West. Inspired by Powell’s actual travel log from 1869. Laugh-out-loud theatre, performed by a diverse cast of not-men who infuse America’s historic myths of male conquest with a sly blast of subtext. Performs Oct. 26 – Nov. 10, 2019 in the Studio Theater at the Hartnell College Performing Arts Center (Building K), 411 Central Ave., Salinas. Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.; Sundays at 2:00 p.m.

Portraying life in another, distant time always requires a leap of imagination. “Men on Boats” starts from the thesis that we can never recreate the past exactly how it was. This play’s perspective is that of a contemporary reader filtering accounts of another age through her own modern-day sensibility. It’s not unlike what Lin-Manuel Miranda is doing with his hip-hop musical, “Hamilton.” That women speaking in a 21st-century vernacular portraying 19<sup>th</sup> century men here, weaves the modern point of view into the very fabric of the performance. The tone is comic, but never cute or camp. And ultimately, the play respects its bold if fallible pioneers, in all their natural bravery and fearfulness while it posits the possibility that women could achieve the same historic feats if allowed.

By the way, there isn’t a man in the 10-member cast of “Men on Boats.” For centuries, stage performers have regularly demonstrated the fluidness of gender. . “Men on Boats” is no antic drag show, though it definitely has its antic side. Ms. Backhaus’s lively script leaves no room for nudging references to any gender gap between cast and characters. and makes canny use of the obvious distance between performers and their roles to help bridge the distance between then and now.

The story stays close to “The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons,” Powell’s published record of the historic journey he organized for the United States government. We follow Powell, a stately one-armed army major, and his expedition crew as they wend their way through perilous waters to create the first official map of the region. Along the way, they bond, scrap, joke, reminisce and argue about directions, rather like any group traveling together. The stakes, though, are mortal. Several of the team come close to death when boats capsize. Food rations and surveyor’s instruments are lost to the river. The play begins with 10 men in four boats. By the end, that ratio is six to three. How this occurs is brought to infectiously vivid life, making “Men on Boats” an

action-packed play. **\*\*MORE\*\***

**Cast list:** **Niki Moon** (John Wesley Powell), **Christina Moore** (William Dunn), **Jennifer Foreman** (John Colton Sumner), **Monica LaVelle** (Old Shady), **Florence Paget** (Bradley), **Christina McGovern** (O.G. Howland), **DeAnna Diaz** (Seneca Howland), **Anna Schumacher** (Frank Goodman), **Kristin Brewer** (Hall), **Micaela David** (Hawkins)

The Western Stage's production is directed by Ellen Brooks; set design by Nicole Bryant-Stephens; costume design by Allison Dillard; lighting design by Emma Satchell; sound design by Billie Cox; and hair and makeup design by Maegan Roux.

**From the Director:** *Four fragile wooden boats oared by ten explorers, trappers, hunters, a mapmaker and one Brit adventuring in the great American West challenge the Green and Colorado Rivers. The year is 1868. The commission: to chart and navigate a wildly unpredictable waterway, gateway to a majestic fabled canyon. Four months of cramped rowing on a river that swells, foams, and falls; with provisions dwindling and no contingency plan shape this robust, crazed crew into American heroes with a place in history. And in Jaclyn Backhaus' play these ten intrepid are all women. –Director, Ellen Brooks*

This event is wheelchair accessible. Individuals requiring other accommodations should contact the Box Office at least one week prior to the event: (831)-755-6816

## **DETAILS**

**WHAT:** The Western Stage voyages into the untamed American West with “Men on Boats” by Jaclyn Backhaus. Spinning historical, theatrical, and gender conventions on their heads, this subversive tale of 10 men, four boats, and two rivers contains none of the above.

**WHEN:** Oct. 26, 27, Nov. 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10. Fridays and Saturdays, 7:30 p.m. Sundays 2:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** Studio Theater, K116. Hartnell College Performing Arts Center, Building K, 411 Central Ave., Salinas, Calif. 93901.

**TICKETS AND INFO:** \$26 general admission, \$24 for seniors and military and \$12 for children age 5-15. Hartnell students are free with student I.D. Other students \$20 with I.D. or \$5 Student Rush (cash only) on day of performance. For single or group tickets and information, go to [westernstage.com](http://westernstage.com) or call (831)-755-6816 (5-8 p.m., Wednesday-Saturday).

**PRESS:** Contact Customer Relations Manager, Berniz House by phone: (831)-759-6012 or email: [bhouse@hartnell.edu](mailto:bhouse@hartnell.edu).

## **ABOUT THE WESTERN STAGE**

Founded in 1974, The Western Stage (TWS) has evolved over the past four decades into one of the most respected community-based theaters on California's Central Coast. TWS is committed to enriching the culture of its community by bringing together professional artists, theatre students and community members to produce a dynamic season of plays that enhances the lives of both the artist and audience, developing new works that speak to the history and culture of the Salinas Valley and providing educational opportunities that allow students of all skill levels to explore and develop their unique talents. [www.westernstage.com](http://www.westernstage.com)

## **HARTNELL COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT – ESTABLISHED IN 1920**

The Hartnell CCD serves over 17,000 students annually through its main campus in Salinas, the Alisal Campus in East Salinas, the King City Education Center, and various outreach learning centers throughout the Salinas

Valley. Hartnell College, a Hispanic Serving Institution, provides associate degree and certificate programs, workforce-training, courses in basic skills, and prepares students for transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Hartnell College is recognized for its innovative public and private partnerships that support world-class education for STEM, career technical education, fine and performing arts, humanities/social sciences, nursing/healthcare, and athletics. We are proud to be the winners of the 2015 Innovation Award for CSin3 – a Computer Science bachelor’s degree in three years. **We are growing leaders through opportunity, engagement, and achievement.** For more about Hartnell CCD, visit [www.hartnell.edu](http://www.hartnell.edu).

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