



**San Jose Repertory Theatre Presents the World Premiere of
The Haunting of Winchester**

SAN JOSE, Calif. – The 25th anniversary season at The Rep opens with the world premiere of “The Haunting of Winchester,” with book and lyrics by Mary Bracken Phillips, music and orchestration by Craig Bohmler and directed by Michael Butler.

Was she an eccentric, a visionary, an "outsider artist," or the most haunted woman in history? Composer Craig Bohmler (*Enter the Guardsman*) and Tony award-nominated playwright Mary Bracken Phillips boldly imagine the haunting tale of rifle heiress Sarah Winchester and her world of ghosts, guns and guilt. All at once redemptive, funny, thought provoking and magical, this world premiere musical probes the perils and pitfalls of producing "the gun that won the west," and the high price of fortune.

Dates:	September 3 to October 2, 2005
Previews:	September 3 through 8
Opening Night:	Friday, Sept. 9
Location:	San Jose Repertory Theatre, 101 Paseo de San Antonio (between Second and Third Streets in downtown San Jose)
Tickets:	\$15 to \$55. (Discounts available for students, seniors, teachers and groups)
Box Office:	408.367.7255 or buy online at www.sjrep.com

More detailed information about the show/composer/lyricist/director follows:

The *Haunting of Winchester* by San Jose-area composer Craig Bohmler (*Enter the Guardsmen*) and playwright/Tony Award-nominee Mary Bracken Phillips is based on the story of Winchester rifle heiress Sarah Winchester. Born in 1839, Sarah was the belle of New Haven, with her many talents and a beauty well known by the young men in town. In 1862, she met and married William Wirt Winchester, the son and heir of Oliver Winchester, the famed gun manufacturer.

The rifle that would start the creation of the Winchester fortune was the Winchester "Henry Rifle"-a total revolution in gun design. With the beginning of the Civil War on the horizon, William's company, the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, began to produce thousands of rifles, obtaining a fortune from government contracts. The Henry Rifle was developed in 1860 and redesigned in 1866, becoming the Winchester Repeating Rifle. By 1873 the company released the model that became famous as "the gun that won the West." While the Civil War was going in earnest, Sarah married William. What would follow in the life of

Sarah was the beginning of what many believe to be a family curse that led to the building of the most bizarre house in the world.

The Haunting of Winchester could be subtitled "A Speculative Musical." Very little is known for certain about Sarah Winchester after her arrival in San Jose in 1884. Legend has it that following the mysterious death of her infant daughter in 1866 and her husband in 1881, a Boston medium told her that she was haunted by the spirits of those killed by the Winchester rifle and advised her to move west, and build a great house to appease the ghosts, or was it to confuse them? Some say she believed her death could be staved off as long as construction never stopped. No one really knows. Sarah Winchester was famously reclusive and left no journals or diaries.

Whatever her reasons, Sarah Winchester started remodeling with a passion-building 24 hours a day, seven days a week, non-stop until her death 38 years later. She began with an unfurnished eight-room farmhouse and turned it into an Escheresque six-acre mansion with 160 rooms, 2,000 doors, 10,000 windows, 47 stairways, 13 bathrooms and 6 kitchens. She never had a guest stay with her.

Bohmler and Phillips have taken the legend of Sarah Winchester's haunting and used it to tell a ghost story that's part revenge drama and part romantic comedy; a story of self-discovery and spirit recovery. Pitted against Sarah is the ghost of Jack Kerrigan, a notorious outlaw gunman who was, indeed, killed by a Winchester rifle. In a unique twist, Kerrigan is, in turn, haunted by the ghosts of all those he outdrew and killed, a Barbershop Quartet of cadavers as riddled with comedy as they are with bullets. Sarah and her house unwittingly become the means for atonement and redemption for both the living and the dead.

The production of The Haunting of Winchester was made possible by the support of Anne and Greg Avis and the Silicon Valley New Works Initiative. The Silicon Valley New Works Initiative is a program of San Jose Repertory Theatre designed to give support to new plays that speak to the unique West Coast experience and California perspective. The Haunting of Winchester was commissioned through this program, as were previous works, such as The Wind Cries Mary, by Philip Kan Gotanda. The Haunting of Winchester was subsequently work-shopped in the 2002 New America Playwrights Festival and continued to be worked on with readings in New York in 2003 and again in San Jose in October of 2004. It will now open The Rep's 25th Anniversary Season.

Craig Bohmler is a composer/pianist/conductor whose works have been widely performed in North America and Europe. Bohmler has seven musicals and three operas to his credit including Enter the Guardsmen, which was nominated for "Best Musical" at the Olivier Awards and produced by The Rep in December, 2000. His other works include The Tale of the Nutcracker (premiered by Opera San Jose), Gunmetal Blues (San Jose Stage) Gretel and Hansel, How to Make a Musical and The Quiltmaker's Gift.

Mary Bracken Phillips is an award-winning playwright, lyricist and actress. A Broadway veteran, her credits include Martha Jefferson in 1776 and Grace Farrell in Annie. She was

nominated for the 1992 Tony Award for her lyrics for the Broadway musical Metro and took nine Bay Area Critics Awards for her musical Brimstone. She wrote the book and lyrics for Mountain Days (with composer Craig Bohmler), a musical on the life of naturalist John Muir.

Michael Butler is known for his imaginative and visually innovative productions including Nixon's Nixon, Desire Under the Elms and Mary's Wedding. Butler also co-wrote the music and lyrics to Thunder Knocking on the Door, which opened San Jose Rep's new theatre in 1997. A graduate of Juilliard, Butler has also performed on and off-Broadway, on TV and in film, and has directed nationally at theatres such as Shakespeare Santa Cruz, ACT (Seattle) and Seattle Rep. He has also toured internationally with his performance art pieces, Shout & Twist and It's Still Life.

Press Inquires:
ORLOFF/WILLIAMS
Two North Second Street, Suite 100
San Jose, CA 95113-1302

Nanci Williams
408.293.1791
nwilliams@orloffwilliams.com

San Jose Rep press associate
Gioconda Corral
408.367.7297
giocondac@sjrep.com

- end -