



The friends and family of *More Tales of the City*

# The little sequel that could

**Armistead Maupin's "More Tales of the City" isn't returning to PBS, but cable network Showtime is bringing the challenging film to the screen**

by Jeffrey Newman

"The idea of having John and Michael in the midst of love making while Anita Bryant announces her campaign was too good to pass up," Maupin says of the controversial scene. "I imagine there will be a fair number of Bible thumpers who will not be happy with me again."

Unlike the first film, *More Tales* features a developing lesbian love story, which Maupin calls "a very lovely story line. Here we clearly have two women who start as friends and end up falling in love with each other, which seems to happen more frequently in lesbian life than in gay male life."

Maupin says his goal with the second movie was to challenge the viewers even more than the first time around. For Maupin, that means lots of sex and blunt language.

"Until society gets used to that imagery, homosexuality will remain demonized," he says. "It sounds like all I'm out to do is shock and scandalize. But there's a moral message at the center of it all, which has to do with tolerance and acceptance and a lot of corny things that I believe in."

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It has been a long road for Armistead Maupin to bring the sequel to his bestselling novel, *Tales of the City*, to the small screen.

The first *Tales* movie, produced by Britain's Channel Four for \$8 million, was broadcast by PBS' American Playhouse. Channel Four offered the original series to PBS for only \$1 million. PBS spokesman Harry Forbes grants the original series provoked a mountain of controversy from conservatives: "Some stations got bomb threats...some state legislators condemned PBS." Nevertheless, he insists PBS turned down *More Tales of the City* not because of political pressure, but because the pricetag had jumped to \$4 million. That figure, says Forbes, is "totally beyond what we'd be capable of paying."

Not so for Showtime. Last year the cable giant Showtime opted to bring the six-hour miniseries, which premieres in two parts on June 7 and 8, to its subscribers. The series will run on the cable network throughout June and July.

"It's been a long road to get to here, but I'm very excited," says the 53-year-old author, who is single and lives in San Francisco. "We didn't have any difficulty with the making of the film. The production entity wanted to be as faithful to the book as possible. There was no censoring in any way. I'm very proud of what we have to offer people. I can't predict what the response will be. But I'm very happy with the film we've produced."

Much of the original cast has returned for *More Tales of the City*, including Olympia Dukakis, Laura Linney, Bill Campbell, Parker Posey and Barbara Garrick. Other original

actors—Chloe Webb, Paul Gross, Stanley DeSantis and Marcus D'Amico among them—opted not to return.

Joining the cast for the second round are Swoosie Kurtz, Edward Asner, Sheila McCarthy and Paul Bartel, as well as openly gay actors Scott Thompson (*Kids in the Hall*) and Dan Butler (*Frasier*).

"There was a special pleasure reuniting with the cast members who did come back and finding us on that set again," Maupin says. "It's like revisiting an old family estate and finding it's still intact."

*Tales of the City* is the story of a very gay San Francisco in the 1970s, during the heyday of gay cruising, bathhouse pickups, deep kissing, bawdy humor and sleeping around. The sequel picks up just days after the first one ends and takes place on the Pacific coast of Mexico and in Nevada, in addition to San Francisco.

*More Tales of the City* is a much more adventurous story; there's a fair amount of casual frontal nudity in the new film. In one scene, the main characters, John and Michael, are seen naked in bed while a news broadcast featuring famed anti-gay fanatic Anita Bryant airs in the background. In the broadcast, Bryant is

railing about the sins of homosexuality. The book introduces Bryant's campaign to repeal a gay rights law in Dade County, Fla., by way of Michael's mother. But Maupin wanted a more cinematic way to portray the historic event, and used the original 1977 television footage of Bryant for the film.

Bill Campbell (left) as Jon Fielding and Paul Hopkins as Michael Tolliver

