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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WORLD PREMIERE OF STEW'S *PASSING STRANGE*
COOKS UP SEX, DRUGS & ROCK N' ROLL AT BERKELEY REP**

Musician with cult following brings his songs to the stage in show headed for NYC

SEPTEMBER 6, 2006 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre's 2006/07 Season pumps up the volume with the world premiere of a wild new musical: *Passing Strange* is the heartfelt and hilarious story of a young black bohemian who charts a course for "the real" through sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Developed at the Sundance Theatre Lab and premiering on Berkeley Rep's intimate Thrust Stage, *Passing Strange* features the provocative musician known as **Stew**, a celebrated singer/songwriter who developed a cult following with a band called **The Negro Problem**. Co-commissioned and co-produced by Berkeley Rep and The Public Theater, *Passing Strange* begins previews in Berkeley on **October 19**, opens **October 25**, and closes **December 3** before heading to New York City in January. So don't wait too long to take this *Strange* trip!

Stew penned the book and lyrics for *Passing Strange*, and composed the music with his longtime creative partner, **Heidi Rodewald**. The pair conceived the show along with its director, **Annie Dorsen**. The executive producer for the Berkeley run of *Passing Strange* is the Strauch Kulhanjian Family; the season producers for Berkeley Rep's 39th year are Wayne Jordan and Quinn Delaney; and the official season sponsors are BART and Wells Fargo.

"When I first saw a workshop of this show at Sundance, I was immediately struck by the freshness of Stew's voice – the originality of his lyrics and the overall strength of his music," remarks **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "His intelligence shines through the piece, and his unique perspective lifts it beyond the formulaic approach of your average musical. Stew has the courage and the talent to say something original about growing up black in America, while also revealing to us the exotic life of a musician in Europe. *Passing Strange* truly feels fresh, vibrant, and fun – so I'm thrilled to share this piece with audiences in Berkeley and New York."

"We're on the cutting edge of new musical theatre, combining drama and music in an exciting, vivid, theatrical form," adds The Public's artistic director, **Oskar Eustis**. "Stew is an extraordinary

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singer/songwriter whose band, The Negro Problem, has a following from Los Angeles to New York, and *Passing Strange* is his first theatrical creation. It's a wonderful journey, a vibrant stew of blues, rock and roll, gospel, and pop in what promises to be a thrilling and groundbreaking evening of theatre."

The world premiere of ***Passing Strange*** takes musical theatre on a whole new trip. Loaded with soulful lyrics, packed with political irony, and overflowing with passion, the show takes us from black, middle-class America to Amsterdam, Berlin, and beyond. It's a quirky journey from L.A. to authenticity, crossing boundaries of place, identity, and theatrical convention on the way. Stew's unique sound has been dubbed Afro-Baroque cabaret, and ***Entertainment Weekly*** has twice named his CDs Album of the Year. His songs have won praise for their hook-filled melodies, taut poetic narratives, incisive portraits, and sardonic sense of humor. The ***Village Voice*** proclaims that "music this smart and tart, fussy and funny will never hit the mainstream," while the ***Los Angeles Times*** exclaims that his songs are "gorgeous, deeply felt, wildly sophisticated, and at times hilarious." Join Stew and this remarkable line-up of actors and musicians for *Passing Strange* before it hits New York.

Stew is the critically acclaimed singer, songwriter, founder, and leader of The Negro Problem, a pop rock combo from Los Angeles. The group's albums *Post Minstrel Syndrome* and *Joys & Concerns* garnered nationwide acclaim and numerous accolades. In 2000, Stew and Rodewald co-founded the Afro-Baroque cabaret ensemble known as Stew, and their CD *Guest Host* was named Album of the Year by *Entertainment Weekly*. Stew released *The Naked Dutch Painter* in 2002, which again won *EW's* Album of the Year and was described by the ***New York Times*** as "perhaps the finest collection of songs an American songwriter has come up with this year." Stew has been an artist in residence at the California Institute of the Arts, and he recently composed – to his daughter's delight – a song for *SpongeBob SquarePants*.

Heidi Rodewald is the thinner, lighter half of the multidisciplinary ensemble known as Stew. For almost a decade she has been a performer, arranger, producer, and composer in both Stew and The Negro Problem. With Stew, she co-wrote the screenplay *We Can See Today* and, when it was invited to the 2005 Sundance Screenwriters Lab, they became the only artists ever to have projects in both the Film and Theatre Labs simultaneously. Rodewald also recently composed music for Karen Kandel's *Portraits: Night and Day*. In the '80s, she was a member of Wednesday Week, a groundbreaking girls group seen regularly on MTV.

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Annie Dorsen directed workshops of *Passing Strange* at Sundance, The Public, and the Stanford Institute for the Arts. She is the author and director of *Democracy in America: Free Speech for Sale*. Her other recent projects include *Antigone Arkhe*, *The Crazy Girl*, *Portraits: Night and Day*, and *Somewhere Someplace Else*. Dorsen also directed the American premieres of *Belgrade Trilogy* and *Family Stories: Belgrade*. She served as director and adaptor for *The Blue Bird* at the Williamstown Theater Festival and *The Crazy Locomotive* at the Yale School of Drama. She received the Sir John Gielgud Fellowship for Classical Directors from the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers and both the Boris Sagal and Bill Foeller Fellowships from the Williamstown Theater Festival.

Passing Strange showcases a **superb cast** of African-American actors and singers. Since graduating from the Tisch School for the Arts at New York University, **De'adre Aziza** has worked with the Classical Theatre of Harlem and appeared on *Law & Order: SVU* and *Sex and the City*. She has won several jazz vocal competitions, recorded jazz and hip-hop music for top New York radio stations, and performed with eminent jazz artists such as Roy Ayers, Miles Long, and Nick Rolfe. Trained at the Juilliard School, **Daniel Breaker** appeared on Broadway in Lisa Kron's *Well* and off Broadway in *Fabulation* at Playwrights Horizons and *Pericles* at The Culture Project. Among his numerous regional credits, he earned two nominations for the Helen Hayes Award when he portrayed Domino in *The Comedy of Errors* and Ariel in *The Tempest* at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, DC. **Eisa Davis** is a native of Berkeley who now lives in Brooklyn. Locally, she performed her play *Angela's Mixtape* at La Peña, and the Shotgun Players will present her script *Bulrusher* this spring. In addition to her many stage and screen credits, Davis has performed her original music on Showtime's *Soul Food* and at BAMCafé, Joe's Pub, the Whitney Museum, and beyond. **Colman Domingo** was last seen at Berkeley Rep in the acclaimed world premiere of *The People's Temple*. His off-Broadway acting credits include *American Maul*, *Bright Ideas*, *Henry V*, *Up Jumped Springtime*, and *Wet* – and he also directed the critical success *Single Black Female*. Locally, Domingo has worked at American Conservatory Theater, California Shakespeare Theater, Campo Santo, TheatreWorks, and Thick Description. **Chad Goodridge** has performed off Broadway at the Cherry Lane Theatre in *The Debate over Courtney O'Connell* and *Home Free!* His television credits include *Law & Order: SVU* and *One Life to Live*, and his regional experience includes roles in numerous plays at Chautauqua Theater Company and the Williamstown Theatre Festival. **Rebecca Jones** recently appeared in *Fallen Angel*, a new rock musical that was part of the New York International Fringe Festival. Her previous credits include *Caroline, or Change* at the Ahmanson Theatre and the

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Curran Theatre, the first national tour of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the national tour and tenth-anniversary world tour of *Rent*, and *How Love is Spelt* at the Lion Theatre in New York.

The cast of *Passing Strange* shares the stage with a **blistering band** of brilliant musicians, led by Stew and Rodewald. **Marc Doten** is the bassist for Double Naught Spy Car, which was voted *L.A. Weekly's* Best Instrumental Band. The group has opened for Ricki Lee Jones, Pere Ubu, Jonathan Richman, Nancy Sinatra, and Brian Wilson. Doten also regularly plays bass or piano with The Native Shrubs of the Santa Monica Mountains, The Negro Problem, The Philabosians, and Stew – and he just returned from a European tour with comedian/musician King Kukulele. As a producer, Doten has worked with noted artists such as Carlos Guitarlos, David Hidalgo, Dr. John, and Taj Mahal. While studying at the University of Miami, percussionist **Russ Kleiner** earned multiple awards from *Downbeat Magazine* for his work with the Monk/Mingus septet. After graduating, he returned to New York to join the popular funk/jazz quartet Ulu. He has also played with eminent artists such as Greg Gisbert, Kevin Mahogany, Felix Pastorious, and Phil Strange. Kleiner's current projects include the Sam Howard Band and The Square Egg. Guitarist, keyboardist, and co-musical director **Jon Spurney** appeared off Broadway in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *People are Wrong!* He has performed and recorded with David Byrne, John Cale, Jewel, Natalie Merchant, Amy Rigby, and They Might Be Giants. Spurney composed and performed the incidental music for *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, received a Bronze Lion at the Cannes Film Festival for his commercial scores, and provides piano accompaniment for silent films at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

A team of the nation's **top designers** is coming into the studio to help produce *Passing Strange*. Last season, **David Korins** (scenic designer) designed Berkeley Rep's *Finn in the Underworld*. He also collaborated with Tony Taccone on the Broadway production of *Bridge & Tunnel*. Korins has many other credits, including the off-Broadway hits *Dog Sees God*, *Essential Self-Defense*, *Floyd & Clea*, *Miss Witherspoon*, *Orange Flower Water*, *Stone Cold Dead Serious*, *Swimming in the Shallows*, *Thom Pain (Based on Nothing)*, and *Tryst*. Berkeley Rep audiences know **Annie Smart** (costume designer) from her stunning designs for *Big Love*, *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *Finn in the Underworld*, *Honour*, *Irma Vep*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *Yellowman*. She has created sets and costumes for countless other theatres, including Joint Stock Theatre, the National Theatre, and the Royal Court in her native England and Arena Stage, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, La Jolla Playhouse, Long Wharf Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, and The Public in the U.S. **Kevin Adams** (lighting designer) designed the Broadway productions of *An Almost*

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Holy Picture, *A Class Act*, *The Good Body*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Sexaholix*, and *Take Me Out*. He earned an Obie Award for Sustained Excellence, honoring his work on shows such as *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* and *Spring Awakening* and collaborations with artists like Eric Bogosian, Richard Greenberg, Charles Mee, Neil Simon, and Anna Deavere Smith. **Jake Rodriguez** (sound designer) is working on his third world premiere at Berkeley Rep, following on *Fêtes de la Nuit* and *The People's Temple*. His latest local credits include *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *Othello*, *Salome*, and *The Tempest* at Cal Shakes and *The Death of Meyerhold* for Shotgun. A recent recipient of a Princess Grace Award, Rodriguez has also created sound and music for A.C.T., Art Street Theatre, Aurora Theatre, and Marin Theater Company. The stage manager for this production is **Cynthia Cahill**.

Theatre-lovers can get down with **13 lucky events** during the Berkeley run of *Passing Strange*:

- *Free Night of Theatre*, a nationwide program to attract new audiences to theatre, takes place on Thursday, October 19. Fifty free tickets will be made available to the public as part of this event by Theatre Communications Group and Theatre Bay Area. To make reservations, visit tixbayarea.com or the TIX booth in San Francisco's Union Square.
- *Target @ Teen Night* begins at 6:00 PM on Friday, October 20 and includes dinner, a preview performance, and a behind-the-scenes discussion with a member of the artistic team. Tickets are \$5 for members of Berkeley Rep's Teen Council, \$20 for all other teens. For more information, call 510.647.2978 or e-mail school@berkeleyrep.org.
- *Opening night* festivities are held on Wednesday, October 25.
- *night/OUT*, an event for the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender community, takes place on Thursday, October 26. The post-play party features gourmet hors d'oeuvres from Venus Restaurant, complimentary drinks from Triple Rock Brewery and Raymond Vineyard & Cellar, and dance music mixed by a cutting-edge Bay Area DJ.
- Three *post-play discussions* moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, November 9; Tuesday, November 21; and Friday, November 24.
- Free 30-minute *docent presentations* about the show are held every Tuesday at 7:00 PM: October 24, October 31, November 7, November 14, November 21, and November 28.

Tickets for *Passing Strange* are on sale now, priced from \$33 to \$61. Subscriptions to Berkeley Rep's spectacular 2006/07 Season are also available, starting as low as \$123 and including the best seats at the lowest prices for this show. Discounts are available for students, seniors,

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groups, UC Berkeley alumni, employees of K-12 schools, and anyone under 30 years of age. For every weekday performance, half-price HotTix go on sale that day at noon at the box office. All discounts are subject to availability.

Berkeley Rep's Thrust Stage is located at 2025 Addison Street, one block from Berkeley's downtown BART station and close to AC Transit bus lines. The theatre is accessible to the handicapped, offering wheelchair seating and special services for those with hearing- or vision-impairment. For tickets or information, call **510.647.2949** or toll-free at **888.4.BRT.Tix** – or simply click berkeleyrep.org.

ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Founded in 1968, the Tony Award-winning Berkeley Repertory Theatre has established a national reputation for its ambitious programming and dynamic productions. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Tony Taccone and Managing Director Susan Medak, Berkeley Rep seeks to engage its audience in an ongoing dialogue of ideas. Through its bold choice of material and vivid style of production, Berkeley Rep reflects a commitment to diversity, excitement, and quality. The company is especially well known for its presentations of important new dramatic voices and its fresh adaptations of seldom-seen classics. In 2001, Berkeley Rep opened the Roda Theatre, a 600-seat proscenium theatre that complements the 400-seat Thrust Stage, and the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, housed in the Nevo Education Center. The addition of these two buildings has transformed what was once a single stage into a vital and versatile performing arts complex.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER

Founded by Joseph Papp as the Shakespeare Workshop and now one of the nation's preeminent cultural institutions, The Public is an American theatre in which all the country's voices, rhythms, and cultures converge. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Mara Manus, The Public remains dedicated to producing new plays, musicals, and productions of Shakespeare and other classics. Over 250,000 people annually attend Public Theater related events on its many stages – six at 425 Lafayette Street including Joe's Pub, and Shakespeare in the Park. The Public has won 40 Tony Awards, 135 Obies, 38 Drama Desk Awards, and four Pulitzer Prizes. The Public Theater gratefully acknowledges The National Endowment for the Arts for its support of this production. *Passing Strange* was developed with the help of the Sundance Theatre Lab, the Multi-Arts Production Fund, a program of Creative Capital supported by The Rockefeller Foundation, and the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation.

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PASSING STRANGE

FACT SHEET

WHO: Book and lyrics by Stew
 Music by Stew and Heidi Rodewald
 Directed by and created in collaboration with Annie Dorsen
 Designed by David Korins (sets), Annie Smart (costumes), Kevin Adams (lights), and Jake Rodriguez (sound)
 Starring De'adre Aziza, Daniel Breaker, Eisa Davis, Colman Domingo, Chad Goodridge, and Rebecca Jones
 Featuring a band with Marc Doten, Russ Kleiner, Heidi Rodewald, Jon Spurney, and Stew

WHAT: *Passing Strange*
 The world premiere of a heartfelt and hilarious new musical about a young black bohemian who charts a course for "the real" through sex, drugs, and rock and roll

WHERE: Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Thrust Stage
 2025 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Downtown Berkeley

WHEN: Previews on 10/19 - 10/24/2006 – Performances on 10/25 - 12/3/2006

- Tuesdays & Fridays @ 8:00 PM
- Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM
- Thursdays & Saturdays @ 2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
- Sundays @ 2:00 PM & 7:00 PM
- No performance on Thursday 11/23
- No matinees during previews or on 10/26, 11/4, 11/9, 11/18 or 11/23

sun	mon	tue	wed	thu	fri	sat
oct 19–dec 3				oct 19	20	21
				8pm ●	8pm ●	8pm ●
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
7pm ●		8pm ●	8pm ■	8pm ▲	8pm	2/8pm
29	30	31	nov 1	2	3	4
2/7pm		8pm	7pm	2/8pm	8pm	8pm
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
2/7pm		8pm	7pm	8pm ◆	8pm	2/8pm
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
2/7pm		8pm	7pm	2/8pm	8pm	8pm
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
2/7pm		8pm ◆	7pm		8pm ◆	2/8pm
26	27	28	29	30	dec 1	2
2/7pm		8pm	7pm	2/8pm	8pm	2/8pm
3						
2/7pm						

□ docent talks ● previews
 ■ opening night ◆ discussion
 ▲ night/OUT

Special Events –
Free Night of Theatre: Thursday 10/19 @ 8:00 PM
Target ® Teen Night: Friday 10/20 @ 6:00 PM
Opening night: Wednesday 10/25 @ 8:00 PM
night/OUT (LGBT event): Thursday 10/26 @ 8:00 PM
Post-play discussions: Thursday 11/9, Tuesday 11/21 & Friday 11/24 @ 8:00 PM
Docent presentations: Tuesdays 10/24, 10/31, 11/7, 11/14, 11/21 & 11/28 @ 7:00 PM

HOW MUCH: Previews \$33 Sundays (2 PM & 7 PM)\$49
 Tues (8 PM) / Wednesdays (7 PM) \$45 Friday evenings (8 PM)\$55
 Thursdays (2 PM & 8 PM) \$47 Wednesday opening (8 PM)\$61
 Saturday matinees (2 PM)..... \$47 Saturday evenings (8 PM)\$61

Discounts: • ½ price tickets available to those under 30 (some restrictions apply)
 • ½ price rush tickets for students and seniors sold ½ hour before curtain
 • 20 half-price HotTix go on sale Tuesday through Friday at noon
 • Groups of 15+ may contact 510.647.2918 or groups@berkeleyrep.org

TIX & INFO: 510.647.2949 – toll-free 888-4-BRT-Tix – www.berkeleyrep.org