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KAROLE ARMITAGE ADDED TO ARTISTIC TEAM OF *PASSING STRANGE*

Renowned choreographer to work on world-premiere musical at Berkeley Rep

SEPTEMBER 27, 2006 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre's artistic director, **Tony Taccone**, announced today that renowned choreographer **Karole Armitage** has been added to the artistic team for the world premiere of *Passing Strange*. Co-commissioned and co-produced by Berkeley Rep and The Public Theater, this wild new musical begins previews in Berkeley on **October 19**, opens **October 25**, and closes **December 3** before heading to New York City in January.

"Karole's work combines classical rigor and refinement with an edgy, experimental aesthetic," **Taccone remarked**, "and that's a perfect match for Stew's smart, soulful, and sardonic music. While *Passing Strange* doesn't have traditional dance numbers, we know that Karole will make great contributions to the show. She'll work with the director, our actors, and the on-stage band to organize and polish their movements and interactions. I can't wait to see the results of this fertile collaboration."

"I'm thrilled to be working on one of the most exciting collaborations I've participated in," **Armitage commented**. "I think of Stew as the Bob Dylan of our time. To me, *Passing Strange* is a kind of performance art piece where there's no separation between acting, moving, the band, theatre... It's this very fluid new theatrical form that is really entertaining as well as illuminating about our time."

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. 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. 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**. 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** (*Democracy in America*, *The Crazy Girl*, *Portraits: Night and Day*).

Karole Armitage is director of the New York-based Armitage Gone! Dance Company. From her first choreographies in 1978, she was recognized as an innovative force in the dance world, hailed as the "punk ballerina" and the "Madonna of dance." After dancing in Georges Balanchine's Geneva Ballet (1973-75) and with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (1976-81), she developed her own style which embraces contemporary movement trends with classical ballet and modern dance to create a virtuoso, high-velocity, image-driven look that is both exciting and expressive. In Italy, she served as director of the 40-member Ballet of Florence and the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Dance. She has contributed to the repertoires of major dance companies throughout Europe and North America, including Mikhail Baryshnikov's American Ballet Theatre, Rudolf Nureyev's Paris Opera, Oregon Ballet Theatre, and the ballets of Berlin, Lyon, Monte Carlo, Munich, and St. Petersburg. Armitage also directs opera, has worked for pop stars Madonna and Michael Jackson, and frequently collaborates with artists from other fields such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Jeff Koons, Christian Lacroix, György Ligeti, Brice Marden, and David Salle.

(MORE)

1997 tony award for outstanding regional theatre / a nonprofit corporation since 1968

Stew and Rodewald are founding members of The Negro Problem, a pop rock combo from Los Angeles that garnered nationwide acclaim and numerous accolades for the albums *Post Minstrel Syndrome* and *Joys & Concerns*. In 2000, they 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." 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 the songs are "gorgeous, deeply felt, wildly sophisticated, and at times hilarious." The pair also 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. Join Stew, Rodewald, and this remarkable line-up of actors and musicians for *Passing Strange* before it hits New York.

Passing Strange showcases a **superb cast** of African-American actors and singers: **De'adre Aziza** (*Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death, Macbeth*), **Daniel Breaker** (*Fabulation, Pericles, Well*), **Eisa Davis** (*Angela's Mixtape, Showtime's Soul Food*), **Colman Domingo** (*American Maul, Bright Ideas, The People's Temple, Wet*), **Chad Goodridge** (*The Debate over Courtney O'Connell, Home Free!*), and **Rebecca Jones** (*Fallen Angel; How Love is Spelt*).

The actors share the stage with a band of **brilliant musicians**, led by Stew and Rodewald: keyboardist **Marc Doten** (*Double Naught Spy Car, The Native Shrubs of the Santa Monica Mountains, The Negro Problem, The Philabosians, Stew*); percussionist **Russ Kleiner** (*Sam Howard Band, The Square Egg, Ulu*); and guitarist and co-musical director **Jon Spurney** (*The Colbert Report, The Daily Show, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, People are Wrong!*).

The intoxicating design for the show includes sets by **David Korins** (*Bridge & Tunnel, Dog Sees God, Finn in the Underworld, Thom Pain [Based on Nothing], Tryst*), costumes by **Annie Smart** (*Big Love, Fêtes de la Nuit, Finn in the Underworld, Suddenly Last Summer, Yellowman*), lights by **Kevin Adams** (*The Good Body, Hedda Gabler, Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Sexaholix, Take Me Out*), and sound by **Jake Rodriguez** (*The Death of Meyerhold, Fêtes de la Nuit, The People's Temple*).

The executive **producers** for the Berkeley run of *Passing Strange* are the Strauch Kulhanjian Family and Felicia Woytak and Steve Rasmussen. 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. Berkeley Rep and The Public gratefully acknowledge 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.

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. **Tickets** for *Passing Strange* are on sale now, priced from \$33 to \$61. Subscriptions to Berkeley Rep's courageous and melodic 2006/07 Season are also available, starting as low as \$123 and including the best seats at the lowest prices. Discounts are available for students, seniors, groups, UC Berkeley alumni, employees of K-12 schools, and anyone under 30 years of age.

For more information, call 510.647.2949 or toll-free at 888.4.BRT.Tix – or simply click berkeleyrep.org.

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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
 Choreography by Karole Armitage
 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 |
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| 2/7pm | | 8pm | 7pm | 2/8pm | 8pm | 8pm |
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□ 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