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ROCK ON! BERKELEY REP'S *PASSING STRANGE* HEADS FOR BROADWAY

After making world premiere in Berkeley, outrageous musical hits Broadway in February

DECEMBER 5, 2007 – While its shows are busy breaking box office records at home, Berkeley Repertory Theatre is thrilled to announce that *Passing Strange* is bound for Broadway. The outrageous rock musical – which made its world premiere in Berkeley before an extended off-Broadway run at The Public Theatre – will open in February at **Broadway's Belasco Theatre**. Produced by The Shubert Organization and Elizabeth Ireland McCann, in association with Berkeley Rep and The Public, *Passing Strange* begins previews on February 8 prior to opening on February 28, 2008. The show – which won **four Audelco Awards** in November – will have its original cast intact, including Berkeley native Eisa Davis.

"We are extremely proud," remarks **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "From the beginning, we knew that Stew had something important to say in a fresh and unusual way, so it was an honor to support the development of *Passing Strange* and to host the world premiere. Our audiences loved it, and we're thrilled to be a part of bringing it to Broadway. As we celebrate Berkeley Rep's 40th birthday, it's gratifying to know that a wider audience will get a taste of the daring work that's been seen on our stage for decades."

"*Passing Strange* is all about pilgrimages to the Real, and my first real-life pilgrimage was to Berkeley when I was a teenager," says **Stew**, the singer/songwriter who stars in the show and penned its book and lyrics. "This is why it was so moving and important to me that the play premiered at Berkeley Rep. Berkeley embodies many of the ideals that are celebrated in the play – a place where people live as if their thoughts have meaning and consequence. **Berkeley Rep was the perfect place for a crazy rock band with no idea what theatre was to make a play.** I can't think of a better environment to have given birth to *Passing Strange*. Probably because there is none."

With a score that has some of the most tuneful, soulful rock songs and witty, thought-provoking lyrics in recent memory, ***Passing Strange*** is the moving and hilarious story of a young black bohemian on a journey of escape and exploration: leaving the confines of his middle-class, church-reared youth in south-central L.A., the further he travels the more he discovers the journey within is the one that counts.

The Belasco is only a block away from the Helen Hayes Theatre, home to another hit that found its way **to Broadway via Berkeley**. In fact, in the last two years, Berkeley Rep has helped send five stunning shows to Manhattan. Taccone made his Broadway debut at the Helen Hayes in 2006 with **Sarah Jones'** celebrated solo work, ***Bridge & Tunnel***. The piece, which was workshopped at Berkeley Rep, was so successful in Manhattan that it extended for five months and won a Tony Award for its star. Meanwhile, Taccone had another play just around the corner at the New Victory Theater: his production of **Tony Kushner** and **Maurice Sendak's *Brundibar*** began in Berkeley, sold out its New York run, and was nominated for two Drama Desk Awards. To top it off, while *Passing Strange* rocked The Public this summer, **Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*** also earned an extended off-Broadway run; **Les Waters**, Berkeley Rep's associate artistic director, brought his acclaimed production of this show to Second Stage Theater after making it a success in Berkeley and New Haven. Finally, **Danny Hoch** – who premieres his new solo show at Berkeley Rep in January – also workshopped scenes from ***Till the Break of Dawn*** in Berkeley before its off-Broadway debut this fall.

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Passing Strange is the first musical by Stew and his longtime creative partner, **Heidi Rodewald**. The pair is best known for the Afro-baroque sound they patented with the band named Stew, winning two Album of the Year Awards from *Entertainment Weekly* for the CDs *Guest Host* and *The Naked Dutch Painter*. Stew wrote the book and lyrics for *Strange* himself, and composed the music with Rodewald. The pair conceived the show along with its director, **Annie Dorsen**.

The **New York Times** calls *Passing Strange* "fresh, exuberant and biting funny... This bracingly inventive show introduces an exciting new voice to contemporary musical theater." **Variety** praises the musical for its "excellent songs and vulnerable heart," and **The New Yorker** writes that *Passing Strange* is "a brilliant work... a finely-crafted, ethnic-minded American musical." The **Associated Press** declares it "a soulful and entertaining new musical, an original piece which seems to scoff at convention, falling somewhere between the common notion of musical theater and a hyper-theatrical rock concert." And **New York Magazine** exclaims *Passing Strange* is "a new musical that – amazing! – actually feels relevant."

The Broadway run reunites the boisterous Berkeley cast: **de'Adre Aziza**, **Daniel Breaker**, **Eisa Davis**, **Colman Domingo**, **Chad Goodridge**, **Rebecca Naomi Jones**, and Stew reprise the roles they played at Berkeley Rep and The Public. Rodewald joins the cast on stage with a band of consummate musicians, including **Jon Spurney** and **Christian Cassan**. The dazzling design team for *Passing Strange* features **Karole Armitage** (choreography), **David Korins** (scenic design), **Elizabeth Hope Clancy** (costume design), and **Kevin Adams** (lighting design).

Co-commissioned by Berkeley Rep and The Public, *Passing Strange* was developed at the Sundance Theatre Lab before making its world premiere last fall on Berkeley Rep's intimate Thrust Stage, where it ran from October 19 through December 3, 2006. It then played at The Public's Anspacher Theater, beginning its run on May 14 and enjoying a four-week extension through July 1, 2007. Tickets for the Broadway run will be available through Telecharge, and the performance schedule will be announced soon. The Belasco Theatre is located at 111 West 44th Street in Manhattan.

In November, *Passing Strange* won four **Audelco Awards** – including the coveted prize for Musical Production of the Year. In addition, Dorsen was honored as Outstanding Director of a Musical, Rodewald was named Outstanding Musical Director, and Breaker received the award for Outstanding Performance in a Musical by a Male Actor. Devoted to building new audiences, the Vivian Robinson/Audelco Recognition Awards have honored excellence in black theatre for 35 years.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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 led to the creation of the ensemble known as Stew, which created two CDs named Album of the Year by *Entertainment Weekly*. 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*.

In addition to her work with The Negro Problem and Stew, **Heidi Rodewald** co-wrote the screenplay *We Can See Today*. When it was invited to the 2005 Sundance Screenwriters Lab, she and Stew 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 before bringing it to Berkeley Rep and The Public. She is the author and director of *Democracy in America*, and her other recent projects include *Antigone Arkhe*, *The Crazy Girl*, *Portraits: Night and Day*, and *Somewhere Someplace Else*. Dorsen also staged the American premieres of *Belgrade Trilogy* and *Family Stories: Belgrade*, and she served as director and adaptor for *The Blue Bird* at the Williamstown Theater Festival.

ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Born in a storefront, Berkeley Rep has moved to the forefront of American theatre – and is still telling unforgettable stories. In four decades, nearly four million people have enjoyed 300 shows on its stages, including more than 40 world premieres. The Tony Award-winning theatre now welcomes an annual audience of 180,000, serves 20,000 students, and hosts dozens of community groups, thanks to 1,000 volunteers and more than 400 artists, artisans, and administrators.

See tomorrow's shows today – right here in Berkeley. Celebrating its 40th birthday, Berkeley Rep is also celebrating rave reviews, sold-out houses, and new sales records for the West Coast premiere of *Argonautika* from Tony Award-winner **Mary Zimmerman**. Next, Taccone applies his expertise with solo performers to two hot projects: the world premiere of *Taking Over*, a spellbinding show from Obie Award-winner **Danny Hoch**, and *Wishful Drinking*, the uproarious new work written and performed by Hollywood legend **Carrie Fisher**. The season concludes with the American premiere of **Will Eno's** satirical *TRAGEDY: a tragedy*, staged by Waters, and the West Coast premiere of Theatre de la Jeune Lune's *Figaro*, directed by **Dominique Serrand**. This year, Berkeley Rep has introduced inviting new prices to ensure that everyone can join the fun. For details, call 510.647.2949 or toll-free at 888-4-BRT-Tix – or simply click berkeleyrep.org.

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PASSING STRANGE ON BROADWAY

- 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), Elizabeth Hope Clancy (costumes), Kevin Adams (lights), and Karole Armitage (choreography)
Starring de'Adre Aziza, Daniel Breaker, Eisa Davis, Colman Domingo, Chad Goodridge, Rebecca Naomi Jones, and Stew
Featuring a band with Christian Cassan, Heidi Rodewald, and Jon Spurney
- WHAT:** *Passing Strange*, the outrageous new musical about a young black bohemian who charts a course for "the real" through sex, drugs, and rock and roll
- WHERE:** The Belasco Theater / 111 West 44th St @ 6th Ave / New York, NY 10036
- WHEN:** Previews begin February 8 – Opens February 28
- TIX & INFO:** 1-800-432-7250 or www.telecharge.com

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