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BERKELEY REP'S *PASSING STRANGE* WINS TONY AWARD FOR BEST BOOK
Rock musical born in Berkeley adds to long list of awards

JUNE 15, 2008 – And the winner is... **Stew!** Today a play born at Berkeley Repertory Theatre took home one of the nation's top theatrical honors when the Broadway production of *Passing Strange* earned the Tony Award for Best Book. This concludes a stunning season celebrating **Berkeley Rep's 40th birthday** in which the Theatre repeatedly set new box office records while earning recognition for its tradition of debuting daring new work and launching it onto the national stage.

"We are extraordinarily proud to have played a part in the long, strange trip of this show – from staging the world premiere in Berkeley to being among the producers of its acclaimed run on Broadway," remarked **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "We knew from the outset that these artists had something profound to say in an unusual way, yet we never dreamed that the show would reach so many people. Like Berkeley Rep, Stew has succeeded by staying true to his vision and his humanity, by avoiding predictable formulas. It is gratifying to see audiences connect with that authenticity."

"Music is something that comes easy to me, and I've received numerous accolades for my songs – but to be honored for my writing means a whole hell of a lot, especially when it comes from theatre people for whom words really mean something," said **Stew**, the singer/songwriter at the center of *Passing Strange*. "Those words took shape at Berkeley Rep, a place that makes space for people like me to take risks and try out things that theatre isn't used to seeing. We loved working there, and we miss that Berkeley scene."

During the ceremony at Radio City Music Hall, Stew repeatedly injected levity into the usually formal proceedings. In one close up during the national television broadcast, he wore silly glasses and a fake nose – and, upon accepting his trophy, he displayed his trademark irreverence by joking, "I thought this was going to happen like an hour from now. I was looking in my pocket for some M&Ms."

This comment marked the culmination of a series of prominent prizes for the popular rock musical, which made its world premiere at Berkeley Rep before bursting onto Broadway with its original cast intact:

- **Drama Desk Award for Best Musical** – as well as the prize for Best Lyrics (Stew) and Best Music (Stew and Heidi Rodewald)
- **New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Musical**
- **Audelco Award for Best Musical** – as well as Best Director (Annie Dorsen), Best Musical Director (Rodewald), and Best Performance (Daniel Breaker)
- **Obie Award for Best New Theatre Piece** – as well as Outstanding Ensemble
- **Theatre World Awards** for Best Debut Performances (Breaker and de'Adre Aziza)

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During the ceremony, the *Strange* company performed "Keys," a beautiful ballad from the show that concludes with a raucous call-and-response refrain. As the band rocked with an abandon never before heard on Broadway, Stew announced to the dumbfounded crowd, "**This is how *Passing Strange* does it!**"

That song – and many others – can be heard on the live **cast album**, which was released last month. In a first for Broadway, the soundtrack can be heard online before it hits stores: all 24 tracks can be downloaded from iTunes right now, or fans can find the CD in local shops starting in July.

Since 1947 the **Tony Awards** have celebrated excellence in Broadway theatre, becoming one of the most coveted awards in the entertainment industry. Presented by the Broadway League and the American Theatre Wing, the awards are chosen annually by 795 theatre professionals nationwide. The prize is named for Antoinette Perry, an actress, director, producer, and leader of the American Theatre Wing during World War II. **Berkeley Rep is connected to three previous Tony Awards.** The company earned the Tony for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997, and two shows staged in Berkeley on their way to Broadway earned top honors for their artists: Mary Zimmerman was named Best Director for *Metamorphoses* in 2002, and Sarah Jones received a special Tony for *Bridge & Tunnel* in 2006.

In fact, *Passing Strange* is the **15th show in the last 20 years** – and the fourth in the last two years – that Berkeley Rep has helped develop and send to New York. Beginning with *Hard Times* in 1987, this string of successes includes Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1989); José Rivera's *Each Day Dies with Sleep* (1990); Craig Lucas' *Prelude to a Kiss* (1990); Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1992); Heather MacDonald's *Dream of a Common Language* (1992); Gotanda's *Ballad of Yachiyo* (1997); Anne Galjour's *Alligator Tales* (1997); Danny Hoch's *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop* (1998); Naomi Iizuka's *36 Views* (2002); *Metamorphoses* (2002); *Bridge & Tunnel* (2006); Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak's *Brundibar* (2006); and Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2007). Taccone's production of Hoch's latest solo show, *Taking Over*, is also slated for a New York run this fall.

"**It is a striking body of work, a reminder of the importance of regional theaters,**" the *New York Times* proclaimed in a recent feature. "Berkeley Rep has a tradition of playing host to formidable talents before their big breaks, like Anna Deavere Smith, Mary Zimmerman, and Mary-Louise Parker. And it has long been a leader in producing writers of color. In recent years Mr. Taccone has put his weight behind producing another underserved group: emerging writers, including Stew, Ms. Ruhl (a recent recipient of a MacArthur 'genius' grant), and Jordan Harrison. Mr. Taccone's approach – to offer emerging writers the same resources as established ones and to hold them to the same standards – has helped yield a string of hits [and] the company continues to pride itself on producing provocative, often overtly political theatre, the kind that generates loud and clamorous debate."

Co-commissioned by Berkeley Rep and The Public Theater, *Passing Strange* is the critically acclaimed rock musical that follows a young musician's journey – from '70s Los Angeles through free-loving Amsterdam to the anarchy of '80s Berlin – in his search to feel something Real. The show has some of the most soulful songs and witty, thought-provoking lyrics in recent memory. *Passing Strange* made its world premiere at Berkeley Rep in 2006 and enjoyed an extended off-Broadway engagement at The Public in 2007. It began its Broadway run in February at the Belasco Theatre, produced by The Shubert Organization and Elizabeth Ireland McCann in association with Berkeley Rep and The Public.

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See tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep. Subscribe now for the 2008/09 Season, which includes the world premiere of Itamar Moses' *Yellowjackets* and another collaboration from Sarah Ruhl and Les Waters: the world premiere of *The Vibrator Play*. Inviting new prices 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.

ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Born in a storefront on College Avenue, Berkeley Rep has moved to the forefront of American theatre – and is still telling unforgettable stories. Founded in 1968 by Michael Leibert, the Theatre quickly earned respect for presenting the finest plays with top-flight actors. In 1980, with the support of the local community, Berkeley Rep built the 400-seat Thrust Stage where its reputation steadily grew over the next two decades. It gained renown for an adventurous combination of work, presenting important new dramatic voices alongside refreshing adaptations of seldom-seen classics. In recognition of its place on the national stage, Berkeley Rep was honored with the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. The company celebrated by unveiling a new 600-seat proscenium stage in 2001, the state-of-the-art Roda Theatre. It also opened the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, a permanent home for its long tradition of outreach and education programs. The addition of these two buildings transformed a single stage into a vital and versatile performing arts complex, the linchpin of a bustling Downtown Arts District which has helped revitalize Berkeley. In four decades, four million people have enjoyed more than 300 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 50 world premieres. The Theatre 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. Now America gets a taste of Berkeley with *Passing Strange*.

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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), Tom Morse (sound), 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, Christian Gibbs, Heidi Rodewald,
and Jon Spurney
Produced by The Shubert Organization and Elizabeth Ireland McCann in association
with Berkeley Repertory Theatre and The Public Theater
- WHAT:** *Passing Strange*
The Tony Award-winning rock musical that went from Berkeley Rep to Broadway
- WHERE:** The Belasco Theater / 111 West 44th St @ 6th Ave / New York, NY 10036
- WHEN:** Eight shows every week:
- Tuesday @ 7pm
 - Wednesday @ 2 PM & 8 PM
 - Thursday & Friday @ 8 PM
 - Saturday @ 2 PM & 8 PM
 - Sunday @ 3 PM
- TIX & INFO:** 1-800-432-7250 or telecharge.com

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