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BERKELEY REP PICKS BOLD NEW PLAYS AND BELOVED ARTISTS FOR 2008/09

**Tony Award-winning theatre's new season features
world premieres by Itamar Moses and Sarah Ruhl,
Berkeley Rep debuts for Amy Freed and August Wilson,
and the return of Delroy Lindo, Martin McDonagh, Sharon Ott, and Mary Zimmerman**

MARCH 5, 2008 – Last week, Berkeley Repertory Theatre opened a hot Broadway musical and saw the fourth straight show in its 40th season earn an extension – now the company reveals ambitious plans for another year of adventurous theatre. Today **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of the Tony Award-winning company, unveiled a bold season that brings brilliant artists back to Berkeley Rep's stage and provides further proof of its commitment to commission 50 new plays by 2013. To top it off, after breaking box office records several times in recent months, the Theatre also declared its new tiered pricing system a success – so, in the coming season, seats will again be available at the lowest price in 10 years!

The season takes flight when Taccone directs the world premiere of *Yellowjackets*, a provocative new play penned by Berkeley native **Itamar Moses**. The next five shows present a parade of our audience's favorite artists: **Delroy Lindo** stages **August Wilson's** masterpiece *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*; **Mary Zimmerman** presents an alluring adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*; Associate Artistic Director **Les Waters** mounts the world premiere of *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* by **Sarah Ruhl**; former Artistic Director **Sharon Ott** returns to direct **Fyodor Dostoevsky's** *Crime and Punishment*, and Waters tackles **Martin McDonagh** again in *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*. The season concludes with a second show from Ott: the world premiere of *You, Nero* by **Amy Freed**. This year of fearless theatre is supported by BART and Wells Fargo, the official sponsors of Berkeley Rep's 41st season.

"I'm proud to announce a season which features such an impressive lineup of artists," **Taccone comments**. "We're coming out of the gate with two new plays by two wonderful young writers, Itamar Moses and Sarah Ruhl, which is a testament to the strength of our new commissioning program. It's also the first time we'll produce the work of August Wilson, a major voices previously missing from our long tradition of multicultural theatre. I know our audiences will welcome Amy Freed and embrace the return of Mary Zimmerman, Martin McDonagh, and Delroy

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Lindo. And it's truly an honor and a pleasure for me to welcome Sharon back to our stage. In all, I'm delighted that we can follow the enormous success of our 40th season with an equally strong selection of work that looks toward our future."

According to a feature in last Sunday's *New York Times*, "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. He is also able to offer new plays a very educated, broad-minded audience... And artists appreciate Berkeley Rep's intimate 600- and 400-seat theatres, in which **no seat is more than 49 feet from the stage**... Increasingly, Berkeley Rep's galvanizing productions have been traveling to New York. The rock musical *Passing Strange*, which opened on Broadway on Thursday, is the fourth show in two years with Berkeley lineage to transfer to a major New York stage [and] the company continues to pride itself on producing provocative, often overtly political theatre, the kind that generates loud and clamorous debate."

The season kicks off with the world premiere of an incisive play set in Berkeley and written by a Berkeley native. Nationally known playwright **Itamar Moses** returns to his hometown with a script set just around the corner in the halls of his *alma mater*, Berkeley High. When the school newspaper publishes an insensitive story, students suddenly find themselves embroiled in a volatile controversy – and even their teachers seem unprepared to deal with the repercussions. Artistic Director **Tony Taccone** directs *Yellowjackets*, a compelling collision of race and class that forces us to examine familiar surroundings with fresh eyes. After graduating from Berkeley High, Moses attended Yale and New York Universities – and later taught playwriting at both schools. Although only 31 years old, he's penned popular plays like *Bach at Leipzig*, *Celebrity Row*, *The Four of Us*, and *Outrage* that have been produced off Broadway and nationwide. "Moses clearly has a playful mind, an adventurous breadth of curiosity, and a delightful appreciation of the tension between form and meaning," *Newsday* notes. His writing is "brashly sophisticated, cuttngly comic, boldly brainy, verbally baroque, structurally complex, and altogether virtuosic," crows the *Chicago Sun-Times*. With *Yellowjackets*, Taccone generates the same mix of intense emotion and timely politics that electrified shows like *Continental Divide*, *Culture Clash's Zorro in Hell*, and *Taking Over*. Commissioned by Berkeley Rep, this new script starts the season on the intimate Thrust Stage.

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Next, renowned actor **Delroy Lindo** returns to Berkeley Rep with the play that netted him a nomination for the Tony Award – but this time, he’s in the director’s chair. Following last year’s triumph with Tanya Barfield’s *Blue Door*, Lindo takes on **August Wilson’s** African-American epic, ***Joe Turner’s Come and Gone***. Haunted by seven years on a chain gang, Herald Loomis appears in Pittsburgh to reunite his family. Surrounded by the vibrant tenants of a black boarding house, he fights for his soul and his song in the dawning days of a century without slavery. “*Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* is an intoxicatingly hopeful blend of history, mystery, myth, ribald humor, music, dance, and enduring faith,” raves the *Chicago Reader*. “Wilson gives haunting voice to the souls of the American dispossessed,” adds the *New York Times*. “The clash between the American and the African shakes white and black theatregoers as violently as it has shaken the history we’ve all shared.” The late playwright’s countless accolades include two Pulitzer Prizes, the Tony Award for Best Play, two Drama Desk Awards, an Olivier Award, and five prizes for Best Play from the New York Drama Critics Circle – including one for *Joe Turner’s*. And, in Lindo’s third outing as a director, he works on a bigger stage: Berkeley Rep’s state-of-the-art Roda Theatre.

Then, in November, **Mary Zimmerman** returns with ***The Arabian Nights***. The Tony Award-winning creator of *Argonautika* and *Metamorphoses* has made her career by reanimating ancient myths, and now she breathes new life into the legend of the 1,001 nights. To save her life, a beautiful bride must spin hypnotic tales of genies, jesters, thieves, and kings – winning her freedom by eventually winning her husband’s heart. He falls under Scheherazade’s spell, and Zimmerman enchants the audience as well with her signature style that transforms simplicity into the sublime. Amidst a thousand tales of honor, revenge, and humor, only love emerges victorious. “If you want theatre at its most unpretentiously poetic, most fetchingly stylish, as humane as it is elegant, I commend to you *The Arabian Nights*,” writes *New York* magazine. “Zimmerman has the kind of transforming theatrical touch that reconnects audiences to what live theatre is all about,” avers the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *USA Today* says simply, “She could stage the Chicago phone book and have it be fascinating.” Don’t miss the return of Mary Zimmerman; this is her sixth production at Berkeley Rep, and this time she works her magic on the intimate Thrust Stage. A co-production with Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Lookingglass Theatre Company, this production of *The Arabian Nights* will transfer to Missouri and Illinois in 2009.

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Coming in January, it's the world premiere of ***In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)***, written by **Sarah Ruhl** and staged by **Les Waters**. Last time these two extraordinary talents teamed up at Berkeley Rep, they gave birth to *Eurydice*, the beguiling show which went on to New Haven and New York – hitting the year's Top 10 list in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine. Now the prominent pair reunites to consummate another play of love and longing, commissioned by Berkeley Rep. *In the Next Room* illuminates the lives of six lonely people seeking relief from a local doctor – but, despite his expertise with a strange new technology, all they really need is intimacy. It's a tender tale that takes place in the twilight of the Victorian age, an elegant comedy lit by unexpected sparks from the approaching era of electricity, equality, science, and sexuality. The *Washington Post* declares that “the Golden Ruhl has the Midas touch,” and *Smithsonian* asserts, “Ruhl, like Dickinson, is a wild original... Even when she tackles darker topics – heartbreak, loss, disease, and death – her touch is light.” The young writer has already earned a MacArthur Fellowship, the Helen Merrill Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, a Whiting Writers' Award, and a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. Berkeley Rep proudly presents the latest work from the author of *The Clean House*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, and *Passion Play: A Cycle*, staged in the Roda Theatre by the Obie Award-winning director of *The Glass Menagerie* and *TRAGEDY: a tragedy*.

In her 13 years as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, **Sharon Ott** led the company to new artistic heights, national prestige, and a well-deserved Tony Award. Now this gifted friend returns to stage a gripping production of **Fyodor Dostoevsky's** classic ***Crime and Punishment***. As a police inspector interrogates a man about murder, we journey through the mind of a criminal. What did he do? Why did he do it? And what would you be capable of in certain circumstances? Before *Law & Order*, there was *Crime and Punishment*. Performed with only three actors, this chamber piece compresses all the tension and pathos of the novel into a powerful evening of theatre. The play's premiere earned Chicago's prestigious Joseph Jefferson Award for Best New Adaptation and was acclaimed by the *Chicago Sun-Times* as “stunningly lean, taut, and emotionally searing.” The *New York Times* calls it “remarkably absorbing... *Crime and Punishment*, in a feat that rivals the construction of the Hoover Dam, has been distilled into a taut 90-minute play by **Marilyn Campbell** and **Curt Columbus** [that] will banish any bad memories you might have of trying to struggle through Dostoevsky's book.” Dive into the greatest crime story ever written, a tale of murder, motive, and redemption that plumbs the depths of the human soul – when Sharon Ott returns to the Thrust Stage.

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April is the cruelest – and most hilarious – month at Berkeley Rep, when **Les Waters** lets loose with another shocking script from **Martin McDonagh**. Last season, the Obie Award-winning director scored a direct hit with his extended run of *The Pillowman*; since then, the Academy Award-winning author released his first feature film, the sardonic and celebrated *In Bruges*. Now Berkeley Rep reenlists these seasoned artists for another vicious comedy: ***The Lieutenant of Inishmore***. Like all of McDonagh's work, *Inishmore* employs explosive dialogue and a perfectly oiled plot that is brutal, bloody, yet irresistibly funny. As part of an I.R.A. splinter group, Padraic thinks nothing of murdering and mutilating his enemies in Northern Ireland – but the sudden death of his beloved cat leaves him heartbroken. Amidst the comedy and carnage that ensues, McDonagh delivers a cutting commentary on the endless cycle of violence that engulfs our world. “Best bloody play I ever saw,” boasts the *New York Observer*. “Its singular playwright has us laughing at our blackest fears.” “Simultaneously appalling and funny, macabre and ridiculous,” proclaims the *Washington Post*. “Audience members regularly scream in shock.” And *The New Yorker* calls it “gleeful and macabre... *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is a sort of cautionary fairy tale for our toxic times.” The Roda Theatre overflows with blood and laughter when Waters and McDonagh band together for another gruesome adventure.

Finally, in May, the Thrust Stage hosts the world premiere of ***You, Nero***. In this new satire from local writer **Amy Freed**, not only does Nero fiddle while Rome burns, he fills the Colosseum with an incendiary mix of sex and decadence. The egotistical emperor commands a washed-up scribe to create an extravaganza that flatters his regime. But to stage the script he must survive the real spectacle at the palace, where his mother, his mistress and an entourage of eunuchs play an elaborate game of deceit and seduction. **Sharon Ott** directs this smart and sassy show as **Danny Scheie** portrays the preposterous king. This is the third collaboration for this talented team: Freed is a Pulitzer Prize-nominee known for uproarious scripts such as *The Beard of Avon* and *Restoration Comedy*, both of which enjoyed distinguished productions under Ott's direction. Now they let loose the tigers on a crumbling empire obsessed with shallow celebrities, violent sports, and sensational entertainment. “Ms. Freed's gloriously funny play is its own argument for the continued viability of an endangered species, the stage comedy,” cheers the *New York Times*. “I'm tempted to quote at length, but the play's delirious charm would surely fizzle in sober newsprint. For evidence of its irresistible appeal I'll just report that the audience staggered out into the sunny spring afternoon with stomachs sore from laughter, and that I await a New York production with unusual relish.” *You, Nero* is produced in association with South Coast Repertory, where it debuts in January.

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For its 40th birthday, Berkeley Rep launched an innovative series of initiatives to make theatre a luxury everyone can afford – and these **new traditions** will continue in the 2008/09 Season. The audience can enjoy free pre-show tastings with local culinary artisans, 30-minute docent talks before every Tuesday and Thursday performance, events like 30 Below and night/OUT that draw a new generation of theatregoers, and a local, organic, sustainable menu that offers delicious intermission treats and pre-show delights for discriminating palates. Even better, Berkeley Rep will retain its **new pricing policy** that lets more people experience the best theatre in the Bay Area. These ticket prices make Berkeley Rep more affordable to people in the community who are just starting school, starting careers, and starting families – because lower prices are now available for every performance!

Get the best seats at the lowest price by **subscribing to Berkeley Rep**. The Full Season package includes tickets to all seven shows, and the five-play package includes all the Main Season productions: *The Arabian Nights*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Yellowjackets*, and *You, Nero*. It's also possible to "choose your own" subscription of three or more plays: not only do you get to select the shows you want to see, you can pick which performances to attend. With every package, subscribers receive valuable benefits such as discounts when purchasing tickets for guests, the right to reschedule for free, and the opportunity to secure seats before the general public for special events like *Ennio* and *No Child...* Berkeley Rep also offers generous discounts for senior citizens, theatregoers under 30, and employees of preschools and K-12 schools. **Subscriptions begin as low as \$66** – and subscribers save up to 29% on every ticket! Subscriptions go on sale today; individual tickets go on sale on Sunday, August 17.

"Berkeley Rep has organized a fantastic line-up of entertaining and thought-provoking performances that promises to please audiences," remarks Wells Fargo's East Bay Area Market President **Tracy Curtis**. "Wells Fargo is proud once again to serve as the official sponsor of Berkeley Rep's theatre season."

See tomorrow's shows today – right here in Berkeley! Snatch up tickets now for the 2008/09 Season, and travel with us into the future of American theatre. Berkeley Rep is located on Addison Street in downtown Berkeley, close to BART and AC Transit bus lines. For **more information**, call 510.647.2949 or 888-4-BRT-Tix (toll-free) – or just click berkeleyrep.org.

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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 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.

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2008/09 SEASON SCHEDULE

Main Season Play #1 – Thrust Stage

***Yellowjackets* – World Premiere**

Written by Itamar Moses

Directed by Tony Taccone

August 29 – October 12, 2008

(Opening night: September 3, 2008)

Main Season Play #2 – Roda Theatre

Joe Turner's Come and Gone

Written by August Wilson

Directed by Delroy Lindo

October 31 – December 14, 2008

(Opening night: November 5, 2008)

Main Season Play #3 – Thrust Stage

The Arabian Nights

Written and directed by Mary Zimmerman

Adapted from *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*

November 14, 2008 – January 4, 2009

(Opening night: November 19, 2008)

Main Season Play #4 – Roda Theatre

***In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* – World Premiere**

Written by Sarah Ruhl

Directed by Les Waters

January 30 – March 15, 2009

(Opening night: February 4, 2009)

Limited Season Play #1 – Thrust Stage

Crime & Punishment

Written by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Adapted by Marilyn Campbell and Curt Columbus

Directed by Sharon Ott

February 27 – March 29, 2009

(Opening night: March 4, 2009)

Limited Season Play #2 – Roda Theatre

The Lieutenant of Inishmore

Written by Martin McDonagh

Directed by Les Waters

April 17 – May 17, 2009

(Opening night: April 22, 2009)

Main Season Play #5 – Thrust Stage

***You, Nero* – World-Premiere Production**

Written by Amy Freed

Directed by Sharon Ott

May 15 – June 28, 2009

(Opening night: May 20, 2009)

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