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BERKELEY REP ANNOUNCES AMBITIOUS SEASON OF NEW PLAYS FOR 2009/10

**Tony Award-winning theatre's new season features
world premieres by Naomi Iizuka and Lisa Kron,
the debut of a musical from Matthew Sweet and Todd Almond,
and a West Coast premiere from Tony Kushner**

MARCH 23, 2009 – Today, even as it celebrates sending another show to Broadway, Berkeley Repertory Theatre announced a new season of adventurous plays for local theatre lovers. **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of the Tony Award-winning company, revealed five bold shows selected for the upcoming year. His ambitious agenda for the 2009/10 season includes three world premieres: a compelling script commissioned from **Naomi Iizuka**, a captivating new collaboration from **Lisa Kron** and **Leigh Silverman**, and the debut of a beautiful musical from **Matthew Sweet** and **Todd Almond**. The Theatre's 42nd season also includes a West Coast premiere by **Tony Kushner**, the Bay Area's introduction to **Aurélia's Oratorio**, and two plays to be named at a later date. Best of all, the cost of a subscription to Berkeley Rep will not increase this year, meaning that some seats for these shows can be snatched up at the 1998 price!

"It's a brave new world out there, and we intend to meet it with a collection of brave new plays," **Taccone comments**. "In uncertain times, I believe the artistic risks we take at Berkeley Rep become even more relevant and important – so I'm pleased that we can honor our commitment to new work with these fine artists and this daring season. It's always a pleasure to collaborate with Tony Kushner, and I'm delighted to welcome Naomi Iizuka back to our stage. Add new talent like Todd Almond, Lisa Kron, Leigh Silverman, Matthew Sweet, and Aurélia Thierrée to the mix, and it promises to be quite a year."

Berkeley Rep's pledge to debut three new shows comes hot on the heels of the revelation that its most recent work is **bound for Broadway**. The Theatre's 50th world premiere, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, closed last week – but the buzz continues. Associate Artistic Director **Les Waters** will stage a new production of **Sarah Ruhl's** stimulating script at Lincoln Center Theater this fall. It's the eighth show in eight years that Berkeley Rep helped develop and send to New York. In addition to the recent Broadway run of *Passing Strange*, these successful plays

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include Danny Hoch's *Taking Over* (2008), Ruhl's *Eurydice* (2007), Sarah Jones' *Bridge & Tunnel* (2006), Kushner's *Brundibar* (2006), Iizuka's *36 Views* (2002), and Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* (2001).

In fact, Berkeley Rep's devotion to developing new scripts has delivered 17 shows to Manhattan in the last 22 years – and the Theatre has upped the ante by promising to commission dozens of new plays by 2013. “**It is a striking body of work, a reminder of the importance of regional theaters,**” the *New York Times* remarked in a feature last year. “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... 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] the company continues to pride itself on producing provocative, often overtly political theatre, the kind that generates loud and clamorous debate.” Now the curtain goes up on a new season of imaginative and intelligent theatre.

In October, it's time for ***Tiny Kushner***, a series of short scripts by the singular **Tony Kushner**. The legendary playwright returns to Berkeley Rep to team up with Artistic Director **Tony Taccone**, who also staged *Angels in America*, *Brundibar*, *Homebody/Kabul*, and *Slavs!* Kushner brings his brilliance and humor to bear in a sparkling string of one-act plays – and his gilded language is guided, as always, by an unwavering moral compass. Travel to the moon – and to the afterlife – with Laura Bush, Nixon's analyst, the queen of Albania, and a host of real-life tax evaders, all adrift in an increasingly fragile world. Kushner is one of the most important and thought-provoking voices in American theatre. His many honors include a Pulitzer Prize, two Tony Awards, three Obies, a Golden Globe, an Emmy, and the LAMBDA Literary Award for Drama. “Mr. Kushner has a curious gene for prophecy,” the *New York Times* notes. “His plays transcend their specific historical time frames because he rides their anxiety at full throttle, resisting the American impulse to invoke closure and wrap things up after they've been cracked open... Kushner moves us, instead, by burrowing right into the open wounds of our cataclysmic modern America even as he memorializes the dead and mines the ashes for hope.” In addition to his many credits with Kushner, Taccone unearthed the intense emotion and timely politics of such recent shows as *Continental Divide*, *Culture Clash's Zorro in Hell*, and *Yellowjackets*. Don't miss these gems from a theatrical giant. Don't miss the West Coast premiere of *Tiny Kushner* on the intimate Thrust Stage.

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Next, spend the holidays with **Aurélia Thierrée**, who literally grew up in the circus. Behind her velvet curtain lies a surreal world of surprises, a topsy-turvy time of tricks and transformations. Welcome to ***Aurélia's Oratorio***, where the impossible happens before your eyes. The granddaughter of Charlie Chaplin, the literal heir to the Little Tramp, has charmed audiences around the world with this dazzling display of stage illusion. "She does wonder wonderfully," gushes the *London Guardian*. With dancing, puppetry, acrobatics, and more, *Aurélia's Oratorio* is an inventive adventure set to a quirky score of chamber music and gypsy jazz. "She balances whimsy and wit, childlike wonder and adult élan, throughout her quietly magical show," asserts the *Boston Globe*. "Her grace, her inventive and fluid movement, and above all her humor simply invite our delight." The *Oratorio* is written and directed by Aurélia's mother, **Victoria Thierrée Chaplin**, who – along with her husband, Jean Baptiste Thierrée – created Cirque Bonjour, Cirque Imaginaire, and Cirque Invisible, innovative troupes that inspired Cirque du Soleil. Berkeley Rep unveils this 90-minute spectacle, a concoction of mystery and fantasy for the whole family, in the state-of-the-art Roda Theatre. It's "an absolute spellbinder," declares the UK's *Daily Telegraph*. "Like most vivid reveries, it momentarily colors the way you see the waking world."

The month of March is devoted to another new play in the Roda Theatre. Well before the digital age, the camera selected, filtered, and obscured the truth – even as it promised to provide an authentic look at distant lands. **Naomi Iizuka** explores the intersection of art and authenticity in a haunting new play commissioned by Berkeley Rep: ***Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West***. In this world premiere, wealthy Americans invade Yokohama in the 1880s with a weird new technology. Their cameras capture images of geishas, monks, and shrines and send them to the future in a flash – where we continue to seek meaning through lenses of exoticism and xenophobia. Berkeley Rep presented the world premiere of Iizuka's *36 Views* before it played off Broadway. "Brash, tender, and metaphysical by turns, her writing is pervaded with the sense of melancholy beauty that the Japanese call *mono no aware* – the knowledge that all things change," claims the *Village Voice*. Iizuka's work has also been seen at major theatres in Boston, Dallas, Los Angeles, Portland, San Diego, and Seattle. *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West* takes its title from the first treatise on photography translated into Japanese. It will be staged by Obie Award-winner **Les Waters**, whose shows have ranked among the 10 best plays of 2007 in *Time*, 2006 in the *New York Times*, and 2005 in *Time Out New York*. Follow an insatiable appetite for intrigue through three centuries in this intricate new show.

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With the coming of spring, romance unfolds in a new musical wound around the tender love songs of **Matthew Sweet**'s landmark album, *Girlfriend*. Meeting in homeroom. Cruising through town. Holding hands. Cheering from the stands. That awkward first kiss. In the world premiere of *Girlfriend* at Berkeley Rep, boy meets boy. It's an eternal story turned upside down, a dual-Romeo duet directed by **Les Waters** that's innocent... and Sweet. "*Girlfriend* is the breathless testimony of a fool for love," raves *Rolling Stone*, "a rock 'n' roll valentine that delivers subtle wisdom with an exhilarating kick." Sweet became a star when the title track from *Girlfriend* hit the *Billboard* Top 10 – and today it's a tune on Guitar Hero 2. A protégé of Michael Stipe, he left his native Nebraska in the '80s to become part of the music scene in Athens, Georgia. **Todd Almond** was so taken with Sweet's album that he penned the book for this musical, taking these familiar songs in a new direction while staying true to the emotions of the original. As a composer, his shows have been seen at Juilliard, the New York Musical Theatre Festival, and New York Theatre Workshop; as a performer, he's played at Manhattan's top venues including Ars Nova, Joe's Pub, and the Zipper Factory. Fall in love with the boy next door at *Girlfriend* – on Berkeley Rep's intimate Thrust Stage.

Then, at a time when everyone's looking for answers, Berkeley Rep and Center Theatre Group present *Five Questions* – a powerful world premiere from the creators of Broadway's *Well*. After an idyllic Thanksgiving filled with food, football, family, and friends, a woman discovers how one kiss – one passionate act – can affect everything... her faith in love, her faith in country, her faith in herself. This tale of heartache and hope unfolds against the turmoil of American politics in the 21st century. Obie Award-winners **Lisa Kron** and **Leigh Silverman** reunite for a searing show which questions whether we as Americans appreciate our freedom. The plays of Lisa Kron "combine novelistic complexity with stage smart impudence," says the *New York Times*. "Wonderfully evocative and often seriously funny, she sets off emotional vibrations that just won't stop." Her work has been performed on Broadway, off Broadway, and around the world. The recipient of many grants and awards, Kron teaches playwriting at Yale and helped begin an award-winning theatre group called the Five Lesbian Brothers. Silverman has staged the premieres of many important plays, including Neena Beber's *Jump/Cut*, Eve Ensler's *The Treatment*, David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*, and Kron's *Well*. She works at renowned theatres throughout the United States and directed *Wit* on London's West End. In May 2010, this celebrated team reconnects to ask *Five Questions* in the Roda Theatre.

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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: *Aurélia's Oratorio*, *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West*, *Five Questions*, *Tiny Kushner*, and one play yet to be named. 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. Berkeley Rep offers generous discounts for senior citizens, theatregoers under 30, and employees of nursery, elementary, and secondary schools. All subscribers enjoy the right to reschedule for free, discounts when buying tickets for friends, and the opportunity to secure seats before the general public for special events like *Ennio* and *No Child*.... Best of all, they have guaranteed seats to sold-out shows while others are turned away. **Subscriptions begin as low as \$84** – meaning subscribers save up to 29% on every ticket! Purchase a ticket package now, because individual seats don't go on sale until August.

Plus, in this uneasy economy, Berkeley Rep offers **free events nearly every night** to help stretch that budget even further. Arrive at the Theatre early to enjoy gourmet tastings with local culinary artisans, pre-show talks with trained docents, and an exquisite menu of local, organic, and sustainable food at the café. Certain evenings also feature post-show chats with the artists or late-night parties that welcome a new generation of theatregoers like Target ® Teen Night, 30 Below, and night/OUT. These free activities transform a play into an entire evening of entertainment.

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

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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.

See tomorrow's shows today at Berkeley Rep! The Roda Theatre and the Thrust Stage are both located on Addison Street in downtown Berkeley, near bus lines, bike routes, and parking lots. This year of fearless theatre is supported by BART, which brings theatre lovers from around the Bay Area to within half a block of Berkeley Rep. **For more information,** call (510) 647-2949 or (888) 4-BRT-Tix (toll-free) – or just click berkeleyrep.org.

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Limited Season Play #1 – Roda Theatre

To be announced

September 4 – October 11, 2009

(Opening night: September 16, 2009)

Main Season Play #1 – Thrust Stage

Tiny Kushner – West Coast Premiere

Written by Tony Kushner

Directed by Tony Taccone

October 16 – November 29, 2009

(Opening night: October 21, 2009)

Main Season Play #2 – Roda Theatre

Aurélia's Oratorio

Written and directed by Victoria Thierrée Chaplin

December 4, 2009 – January 24, 2010

(Opening night: December 9, 2009)

Main Season Play #3 – Thrust Stage

To be announced

January 15 – February 28, 2010

(Opening night: January 20, 2010)

Main Season Play #4 – Roda Theatre

Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West – World Premiere

Written by Naomi Iizuka

Directed by Les Waters

February 26 – April 11, 2010

(Opening night: March 3, 2010)

Limited Season Play #2 – Thrust Stage

Girlfriend – World Premiere

Book by Todd Almond

Music and lyrics by Matthew Sweet

Directed by Les Waters

April 9 – May 9, 2010

(Opening night: April 14, 2010)

Main Season Play #5 – Roda Theatre

Five Questions – World-Premiere Production

Written by Lisa Kron

Directed by Leigh Silverman

May 14 – June 27, 2010

(Opening night: May 19, 2010)

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