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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**BERKELEY REP'S SEASON TAKES OFF WITH PREMIERE OF *YELLOWJACKETS***  
**Itamar Moses returns to his hometown with incisive new show staged by Tony Taccone**

JULY 21, 2008 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre kicks off its 2008/09 Season with the world premiere of a provocative new play set in Berkeley and written by a Berkeley native: renowned playwright **Itamar Moses** returns to his hometown with *Yellowjackets*, a script set just around the corner in the halls of his *alma mater*. Artistic Director **Tony Taccone** directs a multicultural cast of young local actors in an incisive new play commissioned by Berkeley Rep. *Yellowjackets* begins previews on **August 29**, opens **September 3**, and closes **October 12** on the intimate Thrust Stage. The executive producers are Wayne Jordan and Quinn Delaney and Eddie and Amy Orton, the education sponsor is Bank of America, and the co-sponsor is Seagate Properties. BART and Wells Fargo are the season sponsors for Berkeley Rep's 41<sup>st</sup> year of fearless theatre.

"It's a pleasure to work with Itamar, and a delight to welcome a cast comprised of so many talented young actors from our local community," **Taccone comments**. "While this is a homegrown production, it addresses critical issues of national importance as our country continues to struggle – culturally and economically – with the tensions of multiple ethnicities and an increasing class divide. It's a thoughtful and vigorous script set in our own backyard, and I couldn't think of a better way to begin our season."

"Berkeley Rep is, of course, one of the places I was first exposed to theatre," **Moses remarks**, "and Tony Taccone is one of the best people in the country to develop a new play with. So, for me anyway, this is more exciting in many ways than being produced in New York. *Yellowjackets* is a political play, one that raises a lot of sensitive issues about race, socioeconomics, and education – but it's also a very personal play, in that all of the events are based on things that really happened while I was a student at Berkeley High. So to share my work with Berkeley for the first time, in a play that is actually about Berkeley, is quite special."

*Yellowjackets* is a compelling collision of race and class that forces us to examine familiar surroundings with fresh eyes. When the school newspaper publishes an insensitive story, students at Berkeley High suddenly find themselves embroiled in a volatile controversy – and

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even their teachers seem unprepared to deal with the repercussions. It's a sting that's worthy of the school mascot: the sports teams at Berkeley High are called the Yellowjackets, and *The Jacket* is the name of the student-run paper. Taccone workshopped this script in September 2007 with many of the same actors at the University of California, Berkeley – and it 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*.

**Itamar Moses** clearly has a playful mind, an adventurous breadth of curiosity, and a delightful appreciation of the tension between form and meaning," asserts *New York Newsday*. His writing is "brashly sophisticated, cuttingly comic, boldly brainy, verbally baroque, structurally complex, and altogether virtuosic," crowns the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Moses was born in Berkeley and now lives in Brooklyn. After graduating from Berkeley High in 1995, he attended Yale and New York Universities – and later taught playwriting at both schools. Although only 30 years old, he's penned popular plays like *Bach at Leipzig*, *Back Back Back*, *Celebrity Row*, *Completeness*, *The Den*, *The Four of Us*, *Outrage*, and the musical *Reality!* (with Gaby Alter), as well as various short plays and one-acts. His work has appeared off Broadway, on other New York stages, and at regional theatres throughout the United States and Canada. In addition to Berkeley Rep, the following noted theatres have commissioned new work from Moses: Manhattan Theatre Club, McCarter Theatre Center, Playwrights Horizons, South Coast Repertory, and the Wilma Theater. A member of the Dramatists Guild of America, Naked Angels, and the Playwrights' Coalition at MCC Theater, he is also one of the New York Theatre Workshop's Usual Suspects. Moses was recently named playwright-in-residence at San Diego's Old Globe. His plays are published by Faber & Faber and Samuel French.

**Tony Taccone** is entering his 12<sup>th</sup> year as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, where he has staged more than 35 shows, including world premieres by Culture Clash, Rinde Eckert, David Edgar, Danny Hoch, Geoff Hoyle, and Quincy Long. Taccone recently made his Broadway debut with *Bridge & Tunnel*, which was universally lauded by the critics and won a Tony Award for its star, Sarah Jones. He also staged the show's record-breaking off-Broadway run, workshopped it for Broadway at Berkeley Rep, and directed Jones' previous hit, *Surface Transit*. He commissioned Tony Kushner's legendary *Angels in America*, co-directed its world premiere at the Mark Taper Forum, and has collaborated with Kushner on six projects. Their latest piece, *Brundibar*, featured designs by beloved children's author Maurice Sendak: it debuted at Berkeley Rep and then traveled to Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven and the New Victory Theatre in New York City, where it sold out its run and was nominated for two Drama Desk Awards. In 2004, his production

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of *Continental Divide* transferred to the Barbican in London after playing the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Berkeley Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, and England's Birmingham Rep. At present, he has two hit shows touring the nation: Danny Hoch's *Taking Over* and Carrie Fisher's *Wishful Drinking*. His other regional credits include Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arizona Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and San Francisco's Eureka Theatre, where he served six years as artistic director before coming to Berkeley Rep.

Taccone has assembled an honors class of **gifted young actors** to portray the students and teachers of Berkeley High:

- **Shoresh Alaudini** (Damian / Mr. Nelson) is a San Francisco native who graduated from Lick-Wilmerding High School and the University of San Francisco. The first recipient of the Beach Blanket Babylon Scholarship for the Arts in 2002, he has worked with Crowded Fire Theater Company, Golden Thread Productions, and the Shotgun Players. He also served as an understudy for Berkeley Rep's world premiere of *Passing Strange*.
- **Jahmela Biggs** (Tamika / Ms. Robbins) completed the Master's of Fine Arts training program for actors at American Conservatory Theater this spring. A graduate of Spelman College in Atlanta, she has also worked at Shotgun and the Alliance Theatre.
- **Alex Curtis** (Ryan / Mr. Ivanov) grew up in Mission Viejo and now studies at UC Berkeley. He has worked locally with Impact Theatre, the San Francisco Young Playwrights Festival, the Threshold Project, and the Un-Scripted Theater Company.
- **Ben Freeman** (Avi) is a native of Orinda who graduated from the Bentley School in June and will attend Brown University in the coming year. His credits include shows with Butterfield 8 Theatre Company, Contra Costa Musical Theatre, CTA Crossroads Theatre, Crowded Fire, Playhouse West, Town Hall Theatre Company, Theatre Anomaly, and the Willows Theatre Company.
- **Lance Gardner** (James / Rashid) was raised in Berkeley and Oakland. He graduated from Monta Vista High School in Cupertino and Foothill College in Los Altos. An understudy for *Passing Strange*, he has also appeared at City Lights Theater Company, Marin Theatre Company, Magic Theatre, the Pear Avenue Theatre, Red Ladder Theatre Company, the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, and TheatreWorks.
- **Amaya Alonso Hallifax** (Alexa / Ms. Alvarez) is a Berkeley native who graduated from San Domenico High School and the University of Minnesota / Guthrie Theater Actor Training Program. She has performed locally with Porchlight Theatre Company, Shotgun, TheatreFirst, Upon These Boards, and Word for Word, as well as regionally at the Guthrie, Mixed Blood Theatre, and Teatro del Pueblo.

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- **Kevin Hsieh** (Sammy / Mr. Ling) was raised in San Jose and Santa Clara. A graduate of Leland High School and UC Berkeley, he has worked with Dragon Productions, Filbert Steps Productions, the Jon Sims Center for the Arts, Northside Theatre Company, the Silicon Valley Moon Festival, and theatre Q.
- **Adrienne Papp** (Gwen / Ms. Earl) grew up in Palo Alto and graduated from Henry M. Gunn High School and UC Berkeley. She was the understudy for Mrs. Bumble in Berkeley Rep's production of *Oliver Twist* and starred as Tracey Ackhart, Miss Late Teen Colorado, in Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's *Colorado* at Impact Theatre.
- **Craig Piaget** (Trevor / Mr. Terrece) was born in Portola Valley, attended Henry M. Gunn High School, and graduated from UC Santa Cruz and the Clown Conservatory at the San Francisco Circus Center. He is a founding member of Pi: The Physical Comedy Troupe, has worked with Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and understudied the title role in Berkeley Rep's production of *Oliver Twist*.
- **Brian Rivera** (Guillem / Mr. Behzad / Officer Sanchez) grew up in Sacramento, attended Jesuit High School in Carmichael, and graduated from San Francisco State University. He has worked with the Sacramento Shakespeare Festival, Shotgun, Sierra Repertory Theatre, and Word for Word.
- **Erika Salazar** (Sarine) graduated from the New World School of the Arts. Her local work includes shows with Center Repertory Company, Golden Thread, Impact, and San Francisco Shakes.

Taccone has also called **five designers** down to his office and is keeping them after school to work on *Yellowjackets*. **Annie Smart** (scenic design) has created sets and costumes for countless theatres in the United States and her native England. Berkeley Rep audiences will recall her stunning designs for *Big Love*, *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *Finn in the Underworld*, *Honour*, *Irma Vep*, *Passing Strange*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Taking Over*, *To the Lighthouse*, and *Yellowman*. **Meg Neville** (costume design) designed the costumes for Les Waters' productions of *Eurydice* in Berkeley, New Haven, and New York. Her many regional credits include *Closer*, *Dinner with Friends*, *Galileo*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, and *TRAGEDY: a tragedy* at Berkeley Rep. **Alexander V. Nichols** (lighting design) has designed scenery, costumes, lights, and projections for dance and theatre companies across America, including 14 previous shows at Berkeley Rep: *Civil Sex*, *Continental Divide*, *Culture Clash in AmeriCCa*, *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *The Guys*, *Honour*, *The Life of Galileo*, *Menocchio*, *Mother Courage*, *Ravenshead*, *Rhinoceros*, *Surface Transit*,

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*Taking Over*, and *Zorro in Hell*. **Obadiah Eaves** (sound design) worked on Berkeley Rep's productions of *Heartbreak House*, *The Pillowman*, and *9 Parts of Desire*, earning the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Sound Design for the latter show's off-Broadway run. His Broadway credits include *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and *Shining City*, and he also composes for film, television, and his band, Big Hair. **Steve Rankin** (fight choreography) has created fight sequences for many Broadway shows, including *Anna Christie*, *Dracula: The Musical*, *Jersey Boys*, *The Real Inspector Hound*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Who's Tommy*. His extensive experience at regional theatres includes *Mother Courage* at Berkeley Rep. The stage manager for this show is **Michael Suenkel**, Berkeley Rep's resident production stage manager, who returns to the West Coast after the Montreal run of *Taking Over*.

*Yellowjackets* is just the beginning of a **bold season** that brings brilliant artists back to Berkeley Rep and provides further proof of its commitment to commission 50 new plays by 2013. 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 a comedy commissioned from **Sarah Ruhl**, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*; 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**.

Theatre-lovers can guarantee their seats for these shows by **subscribing to Berkeley Rep**. Choose three or more plays and get the best seats at the lowest price. In addition to significant savings, subscribers receive valuable benefits such as the right to reschedule for free, discounts when purchasing tickets for friends, 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, elementary schools, and secondary schools. **Subscriptions begin as low as \$84** – and subscribers save up to 29% on every ticket. Because of Berkeley Rep's recent string of hits, subscriptions are selling fast. For the best seats, order now!

Individual tickets for *Yellowjackets* and other shows go on sale on Sunday, August 17. Thanks to exciting new prices that let more people experience the best theatre in the Bay Area, **tickets start at only \$27**. Additional savings are available for groups, seniors, students, and anyone under 30 years of age – meaning discounted seats can be obtained for as little as \$13.50.

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This change makes 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.

For extra credit, theatre-lovers can enjoy **29 special events** during the run of *Yellowjackets*:

- Berkeley Rep's newest event, *30 Below*, returns on Friday, August 29. It's the coolest night of theatre for the under-30 crowd with a performance starting at 8:00 PM and a wild post-show party sponsored by the *SF Bay Guardian* featuring free drinks, live music, munchies, and more. Tickets start at only \$13.50 for anyone under 30 years old.
- *Opening night* festivities are held on Wednesday, September 3, including a pre-show dinner for donors from Grace Street Catering and a post-show party for the audience featuring food from Maritime East and wines from Raymond Vineyards.
- *night/OUT*, an event for the lesbian / gay / bisexual / transgender community, takes place on Thursday, September 4. The post-play party features music and dancing, gourmet hors d'oeuvres from Bistro Liaison, bouquets from Darling Flower Shop, and complimentary drinks from Raymond Vineyards and Triple Rock Brewery.
- *Target @ Teen Night* begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, September 5, and includes dinner, a behind-the-scenes discussion with a member of the artistic team, and a performance of *Yellowjackets*. Tickets are \$8 for members of Berkeley Rep's Teen Council, \$12 for all other teens. For details, call 510.647.2978 or e-mail [school@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:school@berkeleyrep.org).
- At 7:00 PM on the following dates, theatre lovers can whet their palates for the play with *free tastings* from local vintners and brewers: Hans Fahden Vineyard on Friday, September 5 and Friday, September 19; Bullion Creek Vineyards on Saturday, September 6; Triple Rock Brewery on Friday, September 12; St. Helena Road Winery on Saturday, September 13 and Saturday, October 11; Ventana Wines on Sunday, September 14; Via Pacifica Selections on Saturday, September 20; Winter Hawk Winery on Friday, September 26 and Saturday, October 4; Blue Danube Wine Company on Saturday, September 27; and Balletto Vineyards on Sunday, September 28.
- Free 30-minute *docent presentations* about the show take place at 7:00 PM before every Tuesday and Thursday performance: September 9, September 11, September 16, September 18, September 23, September 25, September 30, October 2, October 7, and October 9.
- *Post-play discussions* moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, September 18; Tuesday, September 30; and Friday, October 3.

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**See tomorrow's shows today at Berkeley Rep.** The Thrust Stage is located at 2025 Addison Street, one block from Berkeley's downtown BART station and close to AC Transit bus lines. For tickets or information, call 510.647.2949 or toll-free at 888-4-BRT-Tix – or simply click [berkeleyrep.org](http://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 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. In the last two years, Berkeley Rep has helped send five hit shows to New York: *Bridge & Tunnel*, *Brundibar*, *Eurydice*, *Passing Strange*, and *Taking Over*.

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berkeley rep

YELLOWJACKETS
FACT SHEET

WHO: Written by Itamar Moses / Directed by Tony Taccone
Designed by Annie Smart (sets), Meg Neville (costumes), Alexander V. Nichols (lights), Obadiah Eaves (sound), and Steve Rankin (fight choreography)
Starring Shores Alaudini, Jahmela Biggs, Alex Curtis, Ben Freeman, Lance Gardner, Amaya Alonso Halifax, Kevin Hsieh, Adrienne Papp, Craig Piaget, Brian Rivera, and Erika Salazar

WHAT: Yellowjackets
The world premiere of a provocative new play written by a Berkeley native and set at Berkeley High School

WHERE: Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Thrust Stage, 2025 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Downtown Berkeley

WHEN: Previews on 8/29 - 9/2 - Performances on 9/3 - 10/12/08
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 matinees during previews or on 9/4, 9/13, 9/18, 9/27, and 10/2
No performance on 10/10

Calendar grid showing dates from August 29 to October 12 with performance indicators for various days.

- PREVIEW
TARGET® TEEN NIGHT
OPENING NIGHT
LGBT NIGHT/OUT
30 BELOW
POST-SHOW DISCUSSION
TASTING
DOCENT PRESENTATIONS EVERY TUE & THU 7PM

Special Events -

30 Below (party for the under-30 crowd): Friday 8/29 @ 8:00 PM
Opening night: Wednesday 9/3 @ 8:00 PM
night/OUT (LGBT event): Thursday 9/4 @ 8:00 PM
Target @ Teen Night: Friday 9/5 @ 6:30 PM
Free tastings: Friday 9/5 (Hans Fahden Vineyard), Saturday 9/6 (Bullion Creek Vineyards), Friday 9/12 (Triple Rock Brewery), Saturday 9/13 (St. Helena Road Winery), Sunday 9/14 (Ventana Wines), Friday 9/19 (Hans Fahden Vineyard), Saturday 9/20 (Via Pacifica Selections), Friday 9/26 (Winter Hawk Winery), Saturday 9/27 (Blue Danube Wine Company), Sunday 9/28 (Balletto Vineyards), Saturday 10/4 (Winter Hawk Winery), Saturday 10/11 (St. Helena Road Winery) @ 7:00 PM
Docent talks: Tuesdays 9/9, 9/16, 9/23, 9/30 & 10/7 and Thursdays 9/11, 9/18, 9/25, 10/2 & 10/9 @ 7:00 PM
Post-play discussions: Thursday 9/18, Tuesday 9/30 & Friday 10/3 @ 8:00 PM

HOW MUCH: \$13.50 - \$71

Table with 4 columns: Ticket Type, Section B, Section A, Premium. Rows include Previews, Tue 8 PM / Wed 7 PM / Thu 2 PM / Sat 2 PM, Thu 8 PM / Sun 2 PM / Sun 7 PM, Friday @ 8 PM, and Saturday @ 8 PM.

- Discounts:
Half-price tickets available for anyone under 30 years of age
\$10 discount for students and seniors one hour before curtain
Groups of 10 or more, contact 510.647.2918 or groups@berkeleyrep.org

TIX & INFO: 510.647.2949 - toll-free 888-4-BRT-Tix - berkeleyrep.org

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