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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WORLD PREMIERE OF *YOU, NERO* TO CONCLUDE BERKELEY REP'S SEASON
Amy Freed and Sharon Ott collaborate on another delirious comedy

JULY 10, 2008 – Today **Tony Taccone**, the artistic director of Berkeley Repertory Theatre, announced that the Tony Award-winning company will conclude its 2008/09 Season with the world premiere of a smart and sassy play featuring favorite local artists: *You, Nero*, a new comedy written by **Amy Freed** and directed by **Sharon Ott**, will rule the Thrust Stage from May 8 through June 21, 2009. Starring **Danny Scheie** as the preposterous emperor of ancient Rome, *You, Nero* will be produced in association with South Coast Repertory, where it debuts in January. It crowns an ambitious season that starts with the premiere of **Itamar Moses'** *Yellowjackets* and then brings a parade of brilliant artists back to Berkeley Rep's stage, including **Delroy Lindo, Martin McDonagh, Sarah Ruhl, Les Waters, and Mary Zimmerman**. This is the latest coup for Berkeley Rep: the Theatre repeatedly set box-office records in recent months while celebrating its 40th birthday – even after reducing ticket prices to the lowest level in ten years – and it has a Tony Award-winning musical on Broadway and two celebrated solo shows touring the nation.

"*You, Nero* is the perfect way to end the coming year, on a high note of incisive, satiric wit," **Taccone remarked**. "Modern American life bears a remarkable resemblance to Nero's Rome, and Amy Freed mines the parallels to wonderful comic effect. I've admired her work for quite some time and have been waiting for the right opportunity to introduce her to our audience. Since the show is being staged by Sharon – who makes up for lost time by directing two plays for us this season – it seems like the stars are aligned for this project."

"I've been pining to work at Berkeley Rep since I first started seeing shows there," **Freed commented**. "I love and admire the theatre. As far as I'm concerned, it's one of the most exciting theatres in the country, and I'm beside myself with jubilation that this day has arrived. The play is a full-throttle comedy that just exploded into my brain. It's great fun for the audience while also saying something that I passionately believe. And I wrote this part with Danny in mind – he's a terrific performer. So to see it come to fruition right here in our community is truly thrilling."

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In this new comedy, 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. ***You, Nero*** is the third collaboration for this talented team: Freed is a Pulitzer Prize-nominee known for hilarious scripts such as *The Beard of Avon* and *Restoration Comedy*, both of which enjoyed acclaimed productions under Ott's direction. Now she lets loose the tigers on a crumbling empire obsessed with shallow celebrities, violent sports, and sensational entertainment. When Rome unravels like its reality TV, everyone wants to get in the emperor's new clothes.

You, Nero is "an uproarious comedy set during the declining years of the Roman Empire," the ***New York Times*** raved after a recent reading at South Coast Rep during the Pacific Playwright's Festival. "Ms. Freed's gloriously funny play is its own argument for the continued viability of an endangered species, the stage comedy. 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... A spoof of theater through the ages – from Sophocles to *A Chorus Line* – *You, Nero* makes lively sport of contemporary American culture, as Ms. Freed imagines the mincing Nero (a magnificent Danny Scheie – but Nathan Lane might want to call his agent now) commissioning an image-primping pageant from a down-on-his-luck dramatist."

This Roman romp wraps up **Berkeley Rep's 2008/09 Season**, an ambitious line-up of adventurous plays that combines beloved artists with the Theatre's commitment to commission 50 new plays by 2013:

- The season takes flight when Taccone directs the world premiere of ***Yellowjackets***, a provocative new play commissioned by Berkeley Rep. Set at Berkeley High School and written by Berkeley native **Itamar Moses**, this compelling collision of race and class forces us to examine familiar surroundings with fresh eyes.
- Next, renowned actor **Delroy Lindo** returns to Berkeley Rep with the play that netted him a Tony nomination – 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***.

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- In November, **Mary Zimmerman** presents an alluring adaptation of ***The Arabian Nights***. The Tony Award-winning creator of *Argonautika* and *Metamorphoses* made her career by reanimating ancient myths; now she breathes new life into the legend of the 1,001 nights.
- In January, it's the world premiere of ***In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)***, an elegant comedy written by **Sarah Ruhl** and staged by Associate Artistic Director **Les Waters**. Following their national success with *Eurydice*, this prominent pair reunites to consummate another play of love and longing, commissioned by Berkeley Rep.
- Then Sharon Ott directs a gripping production of **Fyodor Dostoevsky's** classic ***Crime and Punishment***. Performed with only three actors, this chamber piece compresses all the tension and pathos of the novel into 90 minutes of powerful theatre – under the sure hand of Berkeley Rep's former artistic director, who returns for the first time since leading the company to a Tony Award in 1997.
- And, in April, Waters unleashes another vicious comedy from **Martin McDonagh**, the Academy Award-winning author of *The Pillowman* and *In Bruges*. Like all of McDonagh's work, ***The Lieutenant of Inishmore*** employs explosive dialogue and a perfectly oiled plot that is brutal, bloody, yet irresistibly funny.

You, Nero ends the season in place of the play originally scheduled in the seventh slot: Berkeley Rep has postponed its production of David Henry Hwang's ***Yellow Face*** and hopes to present that show in the fall of 2009 before touring it to other cities.

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. Get on board before individual tickets go on sale on Sunday, August 17.

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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.

See tomorrow's shows today at Berkeley Rep. Snatch up tickets now for the 2008/09 Season, and travel into the future of American theatre. Berkeley Rep is located on Addison Street in downtown Berkeley, close to BART and AC Transit bus lines. This year of fearless theatre is supported by BART and Wells Fargo, the official sponsors of Berkeley Rep's 41st season. For **more information**, call the box office at 510.647.2949 or toll-free at 888-4-BRT-Tix – or simply click berkeleyrep.org.

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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 three years, Berkeley Rep has helped send five shows to New York: *Bridge & Tunnel*, *Brundibar*, *Eurydice*, *Passing Strange*, and *Taking Over*.

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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

Conceived and directed by Mary Zimmerman

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 8 – June 21, 2009

(Opening night: May 13, 2009)

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