

**For photos, interviews, etc. contact:**  
Terence Keane, Director of Public Relations  
510.647.2917, [tkeane@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:tkeane@berkeleyrep.org)

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**BERKELEY REP BURNS WITH AMY FREED'S NEW COMEDY: *YOU, NERO***  
**Sharon Ott directs world-premiere production starring Danny Scheie**

APRIL 7, 2009 – Even as it announces a new season filled with hot plays and another show bound for Broadway, Berkeley Repertory Theatre concludes its current season with the world premiere of a smart and sassy script featuring favorite local artists: *You, Nero*, a new comedy written by **Amy Freed** and directed by **Sharon Ott**, rules the Thrust Stage this spring. Starring **Danny Scheie** as the preposterous emperor of ancient Rome, *You, Nero* begins previews on **May 15**, opens **May 20**, and closes **June 28**. The show is produced in association with South Coast Repertory (SCR), where it debuted in January, and the executive producers of the local run are Philip D. and Shirley D. Schild and the Strauch Kuhlanjian Family. This Roman romp wraps up Berkeley Rep's 2008/09 Season, which was sponsored by BART and Wells Fargo.

"*You, Nero* is my third collaboration with Amy, and I always enjoy working with her," **Ott remarks**. "She is one of the most theatrically and verbally gifted writers I know. The idea for this show began while we were working on *Restoration Comedy*. Danny was playing the role of Lord Foppington, and Amy suddenly asked what I thought of a play in which he portrayed Nero. I was immediately intrigued. Amy and I have made many changes for the Berkeley production after our premiere at South Coast Rep, and I'm thrilled to bring this exciting project to Berkeley Rep."

"I'm delighted to bring a play by Amy Freed to our stage," adds **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "We've admired her work for a long time and looked for the right opportunity to introduce her to our audience. With its mixture of incendiary and subversive humor, *You, Nero* feels wildly appropriate for today's world."

In this new comedy, not only does Nero fiddle while Rome burns, he fills the Colosseum with a flammable 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 clever comedies such as *The Beard of Avon*

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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 it's reality TV, everyone wants to get in the emperor's new clothes.

**Amy Freed**, an artist-in-residence at Stanford University, has delighted local audiences with *The Beard of Avon* and *Restoration Comedy*. She is also the author of *Claustrophilia*, *Freedomland*, *The Psychic Life of Savages*, *Safe in Hell*, and *Still Warm*. In Manhattan, her work has been seen at New York Theatre Workshop and Playwrights Horizons. It has also been produced at respected regional theatres across the nation, including American Conservatory Theatre, California Shakespeare Festival, the Goodman Theatre, The Old Globe, SCR, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and Yale Repertory Theatre. Freed is a recipient of the Joseph Kesselring Award and the Charles MacArthur Award. She was also a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama and has earned several awards from the LA Drama Critics Circle.

**Sharon Ott** has been a leading figure in the American theatre for 25 years. During her 13-year tenure as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, she directed many memorable productions including *The Ballad of Yachiyo*; *Heartbreak House*; *Lady from the Sea*; *The Tooth of Crime*; *Twelfth Night*; *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*; *The Woman Warrior*; and *Yankee Dawg You Die*. She then served as artistic director of Seattle Rep for nine years. Ott has also staged plays and operas for Manhattan Theatre Club (MTC), Playwrights Horizons, and The Public Theater in New York; the Mark Taper Forum and SCR in Los Angeles; Arena Stage in Washington, DC; the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston; Opera Colorado, San Diego Opera, and Seattle Opera; and many others. She has collaborated with important American artists including actors Tom Berenger, Ricardo Chavira, Willem Dafoe, and Anna Deavere Smith; directors Joe Mantello, Stephen Wadsworth, George C. Wolfe, and Mary Zimmerman; and authors Nilo Cruz, Amy Freed, Beth Henley, Philip Kan Gotanda, and the late August Wilson. Ott has earned numerous honors including an Obie Award, two Drama-Logue Awards, an Elliot Norton Award, two awards from the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, and the Paine Knickerbocker Award for Lifetime Achievement. Presently, she is a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design and serves on the national executive board of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

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*You, Nero* features a royally **talented cast** of experienced actors. **Richard Doyle** (Seneca) is a founding artist of SCR, where he earned a Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for *Holy Days*. Among his many film and television credits, fans of *Cheers* will remember him as Woody's father-in-law, Walter Gaines. **Lori Larsen** (Agrippina) was a founding member of the Empty Space Theatre and has performed on every leading stage in the Northwest, including A Contemporary Theatre, Intiman Theatre, and Seattle Rep, She also directed five productions for Seattle Opera. **Kasey Mahaffy** (Fabiolo) has appeared with respected companies such as Berkshire Theatre Festival, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage, and SCR. His other credits include *ER*, *Girlfriends*, *Ocean's Thirteen*, *Veronica Mars*, and the new web series *Is This Thing On?* **Jeff McCarthy** (Scribonius) has been seen on Broadway in *Beauty and the Beast*, *Chicago*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Pirate Queen*, *Side Show*, *Smile*, *Urinetown*, and *Zorba*. His off-Broadway shows include *Dream True*, *On the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, and *Sympathetic Magic*. Among his credits for the screen, McCarthy is the voice of legendary Looney Tunes' character Michigan J. Frog. In the eighties, **Mike McShane** (Burrus) performed in *The Stick Wife* and *Waiting for Godot* for Berkeley Rep and also appeared at A.C.T., Cal Shakes, and the Eureka Theatre. He has been a recurring character on *ER* and *Seinfeld* and a regular on *Whose Line is it Anyway?* His other credits include *Little Shop of Horrors* on London's West End, *A Summer Day's Dream* for the BBC, and the American premiere of *Dumb Show* at SCR. **Danny Scheie** (Nero) performed in Berkeley Rep's productions of *Cloud Nine* and *Fêtes de la Nuit*. He has acted and/or directed at Asolo Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Cal Shakes, Campo Santo, Los Angeles Theater Center, Magic Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, The Old Globe, San Jose Rep, SCR, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, TheatreWorks, Trinity Repertory Company, and Yale Rep. **Susannah Schulman** (Poppaea) was last seen at Berkeley Rep in *The House of Blue Leaves* and *Continental Divide*, before traveling with the latter show to London. An associate artist at Cal Shakes, she has worked with Geva Theatre, the Huntington, Marin Theatre Company, OSF, SCR, SSC, Syracuse Stage, and Yale Rep. The ensemble for this show also includes **Donnell Hill**, **Maggie Mason**, and **Sarah Moser**.

The creation of Nero's empire depends on six trusted advisors. **Erik Flatmo** (scenic design) teaches at Stanford University and is a resident designer at the Magic. His designs have been seen at ACT/Seattle, Asolo, Cal Shakes, The Play Company, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, SSC, TheatreWorks, WET Productions, Yale Rep, and numerous opera companies. **Paloma H. Young** (costume design) has worked with La Jolla Playhouse, the Miracle Theatre

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Group, the Mixed Blood Theatre Company, Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company, the North Coast Repertory Theatre, The Old Globe, San Diego Repertory Theatre, and SCR. **Peter Maradudin** (lighting design) has designed more than 30 productions for Berkeley Rep and 300 for regional theatres nationwide. His Broadway credits include *The Kentucky Cycle* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, and his off-Broadway experience includes *Ballad of Yachiyo*, *Bouncers*, and *Hurrah at Last*. **Stephen LeGrand** (sound design) has worked locally at A.C.T. and Cal Shakes, and at other respected theatres such as the Alliance, the Huntington, La Jolla Playhouse, MTC, The Public, Roundabout Theatre Company, Seattle Rep, and the Taper. **Eric Drew Feldman** (sound design) has played with Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, Frank Black, Pere Ubu, the Pixies, PJ Harvey, the Residents, and Snakefinger. Together, Feldman and LeGrand created sound for 11 shows at Berkeley Rep, including *Serious Money*, *The Tooth of Crime*, *The Triumph of Love*, *Volpone*, and *Yankee Dawg You Die*. The stage manager for this production is **Julie Haber**.

Spend a little extra time at the palace with these **25 special events**:

- *Low-cost previews* take place on Friday, May 15; Saturday, May 16; Sunday, May 17; and Tuesday, May 19.
- *Target @ Teen Night* begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, May 15 and includes dinner donated by Bowzer's Pizza, a behind-the-scenes discussion with a member of the artistic team, and a performance of *You, Nero*. Tickets are only \$10 for teens. For details, call 510.647.2978 or e-mail [school@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:school@berkeleyrep.org).
- *Opening night* festivities are held on Wednesday, May 20, including a pre-show dinner for donors at Downtown Restaurant and a post-show party for the audience catered by Bistro Liaison and Raymond Vineyards.
- Free 30-minute *docent presentations* about the show take place at 7:00 PM on the following Tuesday and Thursday evenings: May 19, May 21, May 26, May 28, June 2, June 4, June 9, June 11, June 16, June 18, June 23, and June 25.
- *Post-play discussions* moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, June 4; Tuesday, June 16; and Friday, June 19.
- And, on select evenings, patrons can whet their palates for the play with *free tastings* from these culinary artisans one hour before curtain: Bedarra Vineyards on Friday, May 15 and Sunday, May 17; Raymond Vineyards on Friday, May 29; Teance on Friday, May 22 and Saturday, June 6; Triple Rock Brewery on Saturday, May 16; and Venus Restaurant on Friday, June 5.

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Be part of the coup! Individual **tickets for *You, Nero* start at only \$27**, thanks to exciting new prices that let more people experience the best theatre in the Bay Area. 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. 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.

Berkeley Rep's Thrust Stage is located at 2025 Addison Street, near bus lines, bike routes, and parking lots – and only half a block from BART. 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, 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 eight years, Berkeley Rep has helped send eight shows to New York: *36 Views*, *Bridge & Tunnel*, *Brundibar*, *Eurydice*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, *Metamorphoses*, *Passing Strange*, and *Taking Over*.

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**YOU, NERO**  
FACT SHEET

**WHO:** Written by Amy Freed  
Directed by Sharon Ott  
Designed by Erik Flatmo (scenic design), Paloma H. Young (costume design), Peter Maradudin (lighting design), and Stephen LeGrand and Eric Drew Feldman (original music and sound design)  
Starring Richard Doyle, Donnell Hill, Lori Larsen, Kasey Mahaffy, Maggie Mason, Jeff McCarthy, Mike McShane, Sarah Moser, Danny Scheie, and Susannah Schulman

**WHAT:** *You, Nero*, the world-premiere production of a new comedy from three favorite local artists: Amy Freed, Sharon Ott, and Danny Scheie

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

**WHEN:** **May 15 – June 28, 2009**

- Tuesdays and Fridays @ 8:00 PM
- Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM
- Thursdays and Saturdays @ 2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
- Sundays @ 2:00 PM & 7:00 PM
- No matinees during previews

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					15 MAY 8:00 PM	16 8:00 PM
17 7:00 PM	18	19 8:00 PM	20 8:00 PM	21 8	22 8:00 PM	23 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM
24 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM	25	26 8	27 7	28 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM	29 8:00 PM	30 8:00 PM
31 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM	1 JUN	2 8	3 7	4 8:00 PM	5 8:00 PM	6 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM
7 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM	8	9 8	10 7	11 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM	12 8	13 8:00 PM
14 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM	15	16 8:00 PM	17 7	18 8	19 8:00 PM	20 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM
21 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM	22	23 8	24 7	25 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM	26	27 2:00 PM / 8:00 PM
28 2:00 PM / 7:00 PM						

- PREVIEW
- TARGET® TEEN NIGHT
- OPENING NIGHT
- POST-SHOW DISCUSSION
- TASTING
- DOCENT PRESENTATIONS EVERY TUE & THU 7PM

**Special Events:**

Low-cost previews: Friday 5/15, Saturday 5/16 & Tuesday 5/19 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 5/17 @ 7:00 PM

Target® Teen Night: Friday 5/15 @ 6:30 PM

Opening night: Wednesday 5/20 @ 8:00 PM

Docent talks: Tuesdays 5/19, 5/26, 6/2, 6/9, 6/16 & 6/23 and Thursdays 5/21, 5/28, 6/4, 6/11, 6/18 & 6/25 @ 7:00 PM

Post-play discussions: Thursday 6/4, Tuesday 6/16 & Friday 6/19 @ 8:00 PM

Free tastings: Fridays 5/15 (Bedarra Vineyards), 5/22 (Teance), 5/29 (Raymond Vineyards) & 6/5 (Venus Restaurant) @ 7:00 PM; Saturdays 5/16 (Triple Rock Brewery) & 6/6 (Teance) @ 7:00 PM; and Sunday 5/17 (Bedarra Vineyards) @ 6:00 PM

**HOW MUCH: \$13.50 - \$71**

	Section B	Section A	Premium
Previews .....	\$27	\$34	\$39
Tue 8 PM / Wed 7 PM / Thu 2 PM / Sat 2 PM .....	\$33	\$45	\$52
Thu 8 PM / Sun 2 PM / Sun 7 PM.....	\$37	\$51	\$57
Friday @ 8 PM.....	\$45	\$57	\$63
Saturday @ 8 PM .....	\$51	\$63	\$71

- 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

**PHOTOS:** <http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/photos-09yn.asp>

**TIX & INFO:** 510.647.2949 – [berkeleyrep.org](http://www.berkeleyrep.org) – 888-4-BRT-Tix (toll-free)