

For photos, interviews, etc. contact:
Terence Keane, Director of Public Relations
510.647.2917, tkeane@berkeleyrep.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UPCOMING PREMIERES AT BERKELEY REP EARN PRESTIGIOUS GRANTS

Theatre receives Edgerton New Play Award and major gift from the Wattis Foundation

JUNE 8, 2009 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre, which has earned a national reputation for developing provocative new plays, has received two prestigious grants of \$50,000 each to fund upcoming world premieres. The Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation is supporting the hotly anticipated stage version of **Green Day's *American Idiot*** – and, for the second straight year, Berkeley Rep earned the Edgerton Foundation's coveted New American Play Award, this time to support the debut of **Naomi Iizuka's** new play, *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West*.

"At Berkeley Rep, we're continuing our commitment to develop daring new work despite the temptation to play it safe in difficult economic times," remarks **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "I'm pleased to see these efforts recognized by noted foundations that share our goal of bringing ambitious and adventurous scripts to the stage. Naomi's new play is further evidence that our commissioning program is succeeding, and *American Idiot* is clearly an exciting and significant project. We are grateful for the grants that will help us present these shows in our upcoming season."

The **Edgerton Foundation** presents its **New American Play Award** to select theatres that have demonstrated a strong and consistent track record of producing new work. This is the second Edgerton Award for Berkeley Rep and the third for a project helmed by its associate artistic director, Obie Award-winner **Les Waters**. In 2008, the Foundation honored his production of Stephen Greenblatt and Charles Mee's *Cardenio* at American Repertory Theatre, and this year it recognized his collaboration with Sarah Ruhl on *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* in Berkeley. The award aims to strengthen the first production of a new script and thereby increase the likelihood that it will enjoy continued life and become a mainstay of the American repertoire. Waters' upcoming Broadway production of *In the Next Room* demonstrates the effectiveness of the program. In the last four years, the Edgerton Foundation has disbursed more than \$1.7 million to noted theatres across the nation. In addition to the New Play Award, it supports the environment, global security, and important institutions in Los Angeles.

The **Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation**, established in 2003, intends to help the Bay Area arts community become – in her words – "four stars, worth the detour." The Foundation supports both the fine arts, including the exhibition of painting and sculpture, and the performing arts, including opera, symphony, and dance, in the cities of San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland, as well as in Marin County. The Foundation is most interested in supporting arts organizations that are presenting challenging and cutting-edge works.

American Idiot, the first show in Berkeley Rep's 2009/10 season perfectly fits the bill. Green Day won two Grammy Awards – Best Rock Album and Record of the Year – for the multi-platinum album of that name, which sold more than 12 million copies worldwide. Now those searing songs seize the stage with the director behind *Spring Awakening*, the groundbreaking musical that earned eight Tony Awards including Best Director and Best Musical. *American Idiot* follows working-class characters from the suburbs to the city to the Middle East, as they seek redemption in a world filled with frustration – an exhilarating journey borne along by Green Day's electrifying

(MORE)

songs. This high-octane show blends an onstage band and an ensemble of 19 young performers with what *Newsweek* calls “a soundtrack for anyone disillusioned by millennial America.” Yet, *Time* concludes, “For an album that bemoans the state of the union, it is irresistibly buoyant.”

Green Day – vocalist/guitarist **Billie Joe Armstrong**, bassist **Mike Dirnt**, and drummer **Tré Cool** – were loud, snotty, scrappy kids from working-class backgrounds who came of age in the underground punk scene in Berkeley. *American Idiot* debuted at No. 1 on the *Billboard* chart and raised the bar for modern rock ‘n’ roll. **Michael Mayer** earned the Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award for *Spring Awakening*. He has directed 11 shows on Broadway, three on London’s West End, two films, and many other projects. *American Idiot* debuts at Berkeley Rep, the theatre that launched *Passing Strange* – and it features every track from the album, as well as several new tunes from Green Day’s upcoming release, *21st Century Breakdown*. It begins previews in Berkeley Rep’s Roda Theatre on September 4 for a limited run ending October 11.

March is also devoted to a 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 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. Her 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 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, which begins previews on February 26 and runs through April 11.

See tomorrow’s plays today at Berkeley Rep. Subscribe now for the 2009/10 Season, which includes five other fascinating new shows: the world premiere of *Girlfriend* from Todd Almond and Matthew Sweet, the world premiere of a new play from Lisa Kron and Leigh Silverman, the West Coast premiere of *Tiny Kushner* from Tony Kushner and Tony Taccone, and local debuts for Athol Fugard’s *Coming Home* and *Aurélia’s Oratorio*. Inviting new prices ensure that everyone can join the fun. For details, call (510) 647-2949 or toll-free at (888) 4-BRT-Tix – or simply click 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. In four decades, four million people have enjoyed more than 300 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 51 world premieres. In the last four years alone, Berkeley Rep has helped send four shows to Broadway: *Bridge & Tunnel*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, *Passing Strange*, and *Wishful Drinking*. Founded in 1968, 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 600-seat proscenium stage in 2001, the state-of-the-art Roda Theatre. It also opened the Berkeley Rep

(MORE)

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. 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.

###

FACT SHEET

WHO: Book by Billie Joe Armstrong and Michael Mayer
Lyrics by Billie Joe Armstrong
Music by Green Day
Choreographed by Steven Hoggett
Directed by Michael Mayer

WHAT: ***American Idiot – World premiere***
A new show that unites the Grammy Award-winning songs of Green Day with the Tony Award-winning director of *Spring Awakening*

WHERE: Berkeley Rep's Roda Theatre / 2015 Addison Street @ Shattuck / Downtown Berkeley

WHEN: September 4 – October 11, 2009 (press night: September 16, 2009)

HOW MUCH: \$16 - \$86

TIX & INFO: (510) 647-2949 – toll-free (888) 4-BRT-Tix – berkeleyrep.org

PHOTOS: <http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/photos-0910.asp>

###

WHO: Written by Naomi Iizuka / Directed by Les Waters

WHAT: ***Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West – World premiere***
An intriguing new play from acclaimed writer Naomi Iizuka and Obie Award-winning director Les Waters

WHERE: Berkeley Rep's Roda Theatre / 2015 Addison Street @ Shattuck / Downtown Berkeley

WHEN: February 26 – April 11, 2010 (press night: March 3, 2010)

HOW MUCH: \$13.50 - \$71

TIX & INFO: (510) 647-2949 – toll-free (888) 4-BRT-Tix – berkeleyrep.org

PHOTOS: <http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/photos-0910.asp#sd>

###