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RAVE REVIEWS PILE UP FOR PLAYS, BOOK & MOVIE BORN AT BERKELEY REP
Spike takes *Strange* to Sundance, *Wishful Drinking* becomes a bestseller, tours and more!

FEBRUARY 11, 2009 – From Los Angeles to Kansas City, from the Sundance Film Festival to the *New York Times* bestseller list, rave reviews continue to pile up for projects born at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. With its commitment to innovation and excellence – and its connection to respected artists such as **Carrie Fisher, Danny Hoch, Spike Lee, Sarah Ruhl,** and **Mary Zimmerman** – the Tony Award-winning theatre is attracting international attention.

“It is always gratifying to see our work reach a larger audience,” remarks **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. “We’re proud to have been a part of these projects, and committed to continuing to defy convention with the shows on our stage. I am confident that our current premiere of *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* and our upcoming productions deserve the same kind of attention that *Passing Strange*, *Taking Over*, and *Wishful Drinking* have received.”

These plays have journeyed far and wide, receiving extensive critical acclaim:

- **Strange trip continues:** *Passing Strange* – the provocative rock musical that was born at Berkeley Rep before bursting onto Broadway with its original cast intact – continues its long, strange trip to success. **USA Today proclaimed it the Best Original Musical of 2008**, and the *New York Times* named it one of the Top 10 plays of 2008 – the third straight year that its annual list of favorites included a show developed at Berkeley Rep. Now BoxOffice.com calls *Passing Strange* “a work of genius” and **“the best film to come out of Sundance.”** That’s because legendary director Spike Lee unveiled a movie version at the Sundance Film Festival in January. “The film is less a documentary than a vividly shot homage in which Lee uses theatrical lighting and gorgeous music to tell a story,” the *New York Times* writes. “The audience at the Park City Library Center earlier this month responded as if they were at the musical itself, whooping, clapping and, yes, dancing, as the movie unfolded over a raucous soundtrack.” As Spike told the Associated Press, “I think **it’s going to be a cult film**. I grew up remembering the midnight shows of *Rocky Horror*. I could definitely see this playing midnight shows for years.”
- **Intergalactic bestseller:** Last winter, Carrie Fisher broke sales records at Berkeley Rep with her outrageous solo show, *Wishful Drinking* – now she’s repeating that success in print. The script has been published and recently reached **#6 on the New York Times bestseller list!** “Only 170 or so pages long, it manages feverishly and hilariously to cover Fisher’s babyhood, plump-teenager angst, stint as front woman in the trilogy of *Star Wars* films, failed marriage to the singer Paul Simon, and various drug-induced nervous breakdowns, without pausing for breath,” the *London Times* observes. “She shoots straight from the hip to the heart. The ease of the style, the thrill of the flow! The book is gone in an instant.” *Wishful Drinking* is available in hardcover from Simon and Schuster for \$21.
- **Taking Over LA:** Tony Taccone directed the world premiere of Danny Hoch’s *Taking Over* at Berkeley Rep last year, before moving it to Montreal and an extended off-Broadway run. Now the pair has marched into Los Angeles with this hard-hitting look at gentrification, and Danny’s invasion has been greeted with the usual enthusiasm. “He once again turns himself into a one-man melting pot,” says the *Los Angeles Times*. “When Hoch is in full bilingual flight

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as a Latino taxi dispatcher or insurgently rapping as a Marxist radical known as Launch Missiles Critical, ***Taking Over reaches out to audiences in a capacious, 21st-century Whitmanesque embrace.*** The show continues its acclaimed run at the Kirk Douglas Theatre through February 22.

- **Caravan to Kansas City:** After its sold-out, nine-week run at Berkeley Rep, *The Arabian Nights* has reached the first stop on its tour, and Mary Zimmerman's show has received a welcome fit for a king. "I need to expand my vocabulary. I need new ways of saying a show is exceptional, unique and an example of the highest level of professionalism a theatergoer can expect to see in Kansas City -- or anywhere," raves Robert Trussell in the *Kansas City Star*. "The playwright/director gives us a show that is **visually mesmerizing, sexy, witty, outrageously comic and, at times, deeply melancholic.** More than that, it's a vivid example of what I choose to call 'pure theater.' It stimulates the imagination in surprising ways with the most basic of theatrical tools – human beings, a few hand props, judiciously employed musical instruments and atmospheric lighting. All theater is high-tech anymore, but this show embraces a low-tech performance aesthetic that pays big dividends... There's much wisdom in *The Arabian Nights* and much humor. This is a brainy show that embraces very low comedy at times. I dare you not to laugh out loud." *The Arabian Nights* lingers at Kansas City Repertory Theatre until February 22, then travels on to Lookingglass Theatre Company in Chicago.
- **And lots of buzz in Berkeley:** Meanwhile, here at home, Berkeley Rep continues to introduce inventive, intelligent, and relevant new material into the repertoire of American theatre. The company just opened its 50th world premiere, "a breathtakingly inventive" new play from Sarah Ruhl. *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* "has the potential to be **a modern masterpiece,**" asserts the *Los Angeles Times*. "Directed by Les Waters in a manner that quietly and vividly serves the writing, the play is at its best when it disregards the dramatic rules altogether. There's an acute playfulness at work, an unabashed enjoyment in letting characters test out new possibilities for themselves as they gain insight into the mind-body phenomenon of human sexuality and the oppressive forces that shape its expression." *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* shakes up the Roda Theatre until March 15.

See tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep – and pick up a copy of Carrie Fisher's book or the cast album from *Passing Strange* in the gift shop. Inviting new prices ensure that everyone can enjoy the best theatre in the Bay Area. To purchase seats, or for more information, dial (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. 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. In the last seven years, Berkeley Rep has helped send seven hit shows to New York: *36 Views*, *Bridge & Tunnel*, *Brundibar*, *Eurydice*, *Metamorphoses*, *Passing Strange*, and *Taking Over*.

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BERKELEY REP FACT SHEET – 2009

SHOWS IN BERKELEY

In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)

World Premiere
Written by Sarah Ruhl
Directed by Les Waters
Through March 15, 2009
Roda Theatre / 2015 Addison St, Berkeley
510.647.2949 / berkeleyrep.org

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)
Thrust Stage / 2025 Addison St, Berkeley
510.647.2949 / berkeleyrep.org

The Lieutenant of Inishmore

Written by Martin McDonagh
Directed by Les Waters
April 17 – May 17, 2009
(Opening night: April 22, 2009)
Roda Theatre / 2015 Addison St, Berkeley
510.647.2949 / berkeleyrep.org

You, Nero – World-Premiere Production

Written by Amy Freed
Directed by Sharon Ott
May 15 – June 28, 2009
(Opening night: May 20, 2009)
Thrust Stage / 2025 Addison St, Berkeley
510.647.2949 / berkeleyrep.org

TOURING SHOWS

Taking Over

Written and performed by Danny Hoch
Directed by Tony Taccone
Through February 22, 2009
Kirk Douglas Theatre
9820 Washington Blvd, Culver City, CA
90232
213.628.2772 / centertheatregroup.org

The Arabian Nights

Written and directed by Mary Zimmerman
Adapted from *The Book of the Thousand
Nights and One Night*
Through February 22, 2009
Kansas City Rep's Spencer Theatre
4949 Cherry St, Kansas City, MO 64110
816.235.2700 / kcrep.org

Wishful Drinking

Created and performed by Carrie Fisher
Directed by Tony Taccone
April 2 – May 3, 2009
Seattle Repertory Theatre
155 Mercer Street, Seattle, WA 98109
206.443.2222 / seattlerep.org

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