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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW YEAR MEANS FOUR NEW PLAYS AT BERKELEY REP**

**For 2010, Tony Award-winning theatre presents three world premieres –  
from Matthew Sweet and Todd Almond, Naomi Iizuka and Les Waters,  
Lisa Kron and Leigh Silverman – and a poignant new play from Athol Fugard**

DECEMBER 1, 2009 – Even as it prepares for the holidays with *Aurélia's Oratorio*, celebrates the success of *American Idiot*, and gives thanks for the simultaneous Broadway outings of two shows developed on its stage, Berkeley Repertory Theatre looks to the future. Renowned for creating new work, the Tony Award-winning theatre will complete its 42nd season by debuting four more fresh plays: the world premiere of *Girlfriend* from **Todd Almond** and **Matthew Sweet**, the world premiere of *The Wake* from **Lisa Kron** and **Leigh Silverman**, the world premiere of *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West* from **Naomi Iizuka** and **Les Waters**, and the local debut of *Coming Home* from **Athol Fugard** and **Gordon Edelstein**. This year of fearless theatre is supported by BART and Wells Fargo, the official sponsors of Berkeley Rep's 2009/10 Season.

"We are grateful to see the work that we created for local theatregoers reaching an even wider audience," says **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "We'll continue to take artistic risks – that's the only response to risky times – and we'll continue to rely on our adventurous audience. Because of them, we can introduce smart, relevant, original plays into the repertoire of American theatre, whether it's *American Idiot*, *Passing Strange*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, or one of the exceptional scripts we've scheduled for 2010 that you've yet to see. It's going to be quite a year."

The year begins with the return of South Africa's master dramatist: **Athol Fugard** comes back to Berkeley Rep with *Coming Home*. *Time* magazine calls him "the greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world," and now his latest script plays on the intimate Thrust Stage. Ten years after running off to pursue her dreams in the city, Veronica returns in rags. Among her meager belongings, she carries a desperate secret – and determination to plant the seeds of a new life for her son. It's a "sad, sweet, and gently moving" show, says the *New York Times*, "a beautifully acted production directed by **Gordon Edelstein**." Edelstein is artistic director of Long Wharf

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Theatre, and has staged acclaimed productions in London, New York, and across America. “As one might expect from a writer of fierce commitment to political and social justice, *Coming Home* quietly condemns the shameful policies of the South African government, which failed to confront the reality of AIDS,” the *New York Times* notes. “But as always with Mr. Fugard, censure of policy comes only through careful observation of its human costs. Mr. Fugard doesn’t need to raise his voice, or even have Veronica raise hers, to make his points.” Fugard’s scripts have earned countless accolades, including the Academy Award, Obie Award, and Tony Award. Berkeley Rep produced three of his previous plays: *A Lesson from Aloes*, *The Road to Mecca*, and *Valley Song*. With *Coming Home*, the playwright once again confronts the hard truths of his homeland while celebrating the unquenchable power of hope.

The month of March is devoted to a sexy and intriguing new script 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***. Taking its title from a treatise on photography translated into Japanese, the play shifts between the present and the 1880s when a weird new technology first seized the world in freeze frame. 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. The intricate parts of this world premiere nestle together like a delicate puzzle... or erotic glimpses of an enigmatic tattoo. Iizuka’s work has been seen at major theatres in Boston, Dallas, Los Angeles, Portland, San Diego, and Seattle. Berkeley Rep presented the world premiere of her *36 Views* before it played off Broadway. The *Village Voice* avers, “Brash, tender, and metaphysical by turns, her writing is pervaded with the sense of melancholy beauty that the Japanese call *mono no aware* – the knowledge that all things change.” *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West* will be staged by Berkeley Rep’s associate artistic director, Obie Award-winner **Les Waters**. The last show that Waters premiered in the Roda Theatre is now on Broadway, and his work has ranked among the 10 best plays of 2007 in *Time*, 2006 in the *New York Times*, and 2005 in *Time Out New York*. Now expose yourself to the mystery of *Strange Devices*.

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With the coming of spring, romance unfolds in a new musical wound around the tender love songs of **Matthew Sweet**'s landmark album, *Girlfriend*. Meeting in homeroom. Cruising through town. Holding hands. Cheering from the stands. That awkward first kiss. In the world premiere of *Girlfriend* at Berkeley Rep, boy meets boy. It's an eternal story turned upside down, a dual-Romeo duet directed by **Les Waters** that's innocent... and Sweet. "*Girlfriend* is the breathless testimony of a fool for love," raves *Rolling Stone*, "a rock 'n' roll valentine that delivers subtle wisdom with an exhilarating kick." A protégé of REM's Michael Stipe, Sweet left his native Nebraska in the '80s to become part of the music scene in Athens, Georgia. He became a star when the title track from *Girlfriend* hit the *Billboard* Top 10 – and today it's a tune on Guitar Hero 2. **Todd Almond** was so taken with Sweet's album that he penned the book for this musical, taking these familiar songs in a new direction while staying true to the emotions of the original. As a composer, Almond's shows have been seen at Juilliard, the New York Musical Theatre Festival, and New York Theatre Workshop; as a performer, he's played at Manhattan's top venues including Ars Nova, Joe's Pub, and the Zipper Factory. Fall in love with the boy next door at *Girlfriend* – on Berkeley Rep's intimate Thrust Stage.

Finally, Berkeley Rep and Center Theatre Group present *The Wake*, a powerful world premiere from the creators of Broadway's *Well*. After an idyllic Thanksgiving filled with food, football, family, and friends, a woman discovers how one kiss – one passionate act – can affect everything... her faith in love, her faith in country, her faith in herself. This tale of heartache and hope unfolds against the turmoil of American politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Obie Award-winners **Lisa Kron** and **Leigh Silverman** reunite for a searing show which questions whether we as Americans appreciate our freedom. Kron's plays "combine novelistic complexity with stage smart impudence," says the *New York Times*. "Wonderfully evocative and often seriously funny, she sets off emotional vibrations that just won't stop." Her work has been performed on Broadway, off Broadway, and around the world. The recipient of many grants and awards, Kron teaches playwriting at Yale and helped begin an award-winning theatre group called the Five Lesbian Brothers. Silverman has staged the premieres of many important plays, including Neena Beber's *Jump/Cut*, Eve Ensler's *The Treatment*, David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face*, Kron's *Well*, and Stephen Merritt and David Greenspan's *Coraline*. She works at renowned theatres throughout the United States and directed *Wit* on London's West End. In May 2010, this celebrated team reconnects in the Roda Theatre.

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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 *American Idiot*. 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.

Individual **tickets start at only \$27** to ensure that more people can 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. These new 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.

Plus, in this uneasy economy, Berkeley Rep offers **free events nearly every night** to help stretch that budget even further. Arrive at the Theatre early to enjoy gourmet tastings with local culinary artisans, pre-show talks with trained docents, and an exquisite menu of local, organic, and sustainable food at the café. Certain evenings also feature post-show chats with the artists or late-night parties that welcome a new generation of theatregoers like Teen Night, 30 Below, and night/OUT. These free activities transform a play into an entire evening of entertainment.

**See tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep.** The Theatre 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. In four decades, four million people have enjoyed more than 300 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 52 world premieres. In the last four years alone, Berkeley Rep has helped send four shows to Broadway: *Bridge & Tunnel* (2006), *Passing Strange* (2008), *Wishful Drinking* (2009), and *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* (2009). 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

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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 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.

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**ATTENTION, CALENDAR EDITORS:**

***Coming Home***

Written by Athol Fugard  
Directed by Gordon Edelstein  
Thrust Stage  
January 15 – February 28, 2010  
Opening night: January 20, 2010

***Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West – World Premiere***

Written by Naomi Iizuka  
Directed by Les Waters  
Roda Theatre  
February 26 – April 11, 2010  
Opening night: March 3, 2010

***Girlfriend – World Premiere***

Book by Todd Almond  
Music and lyrics by Matthew Sweet  
Directed by Les Waters  
Thrust Stage  
April 9 – May 9, 2010  
Opening night: April 14, 2010

***The Wake – World-premiere production***

Written by Lisa Kron  
Directed by Leigh Silverman  
Roda Theatre  
May 14 – June 27, 2010  
Opening night: May 19, 2010

WHERE: Berkeley Repertory Theatre, 2025 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Berkeley, CA 94704

HOW MUCH: **\$16 - \$86**

	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](mailto:groups@berkeleyrep.org)

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

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