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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WATERS DIRECTS PREMIERE OF SWEET'S *GIRLFRIEND* AT BERKELEY REP**  
**New musical based on landmark album features a book by Todd Almond**

FEBRUARY 22, 2010 – This spring, at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, romance unfolds in a new musical wound around the love songs of the landmark album *Girlfriend*. Associate Artistic Director **Les Waters** stages the world premiere of this tender new show, which features music and lyrics by **Matthew Sweet** and a book by **Todd Almond**. Starring **Ryder Bach** and **Jason Hite** alongside a live band on Berkeley Rep's intimate Thrust Stage, *Girlfriend* begins previews on **April 9**, opens **April 14**, and closes **May 9**, 2010. The executive producer of *Girlfriend* is the Strauch Kulhanjian Family, the production sponsor is the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, and the season sponsors for Berkeley Rep's 41<sup>st</sup> year of fearless theatre are BART and Wells Fargo.

"I've devoted my career to developing new work," **Waters remarked**, "but I've never directed a musical before. This show, which is touchingly genuine and utterly lacking in cynicism, was impossible to resist. When I first read the script, I was struck by how Todd had transformed *Girlfriend* into a beautiful story about two teenage boys falling in love while remaining completely faithful to Matthew's brilliant music."

Meeting in homeroom. 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 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." Fall in love with the boy next door at *Girlfriend*.

Of the significant bands and artists to emerge in the '90s, **Matthew Sweet** is the odd man out. During a decade when cynicism, overstatement, and mean-spiritedness ruled, Sweet found a sizable audience by expressing himself with unselfconsciousness, subtlety, penetrating honesty, and the sheer joy of constructing something cool. While so many of his contemporaries disdained rock 'n' roll's past, Sweet deftly channels it, picking up where his inspirations from previous decades left off. A sophisticated aural architect, Sweet absorbed the work of the "three B's" of '60s rock – the Beach Boys, Beatles, and Byrds – along with '70s avatars Neil Young and Big

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RECIPIENT OF THE TONY AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING REGIONAL THEATRE

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Star. His deep understanding of the spirit and craft behind the music of the old masters allowed him to use these timeless palates in a fresh, highly personal way. Sweet is that rare artist who seems directly and intimately knowable through his work, causing his audience to feel a close bond with him – to put them on what they think of as a first-name basis. His albums include *100% Fun* (1995), *Altered Beast* (1993), *Blue Sky on Mars* (1997), *Earth* (1989), *Girlfriend* (1991), *In Reverse* (1999), *Inside* (1986), *Kimi Ga Suki* (2004), *Living Things* (2004), and *Son of Altered Beast* (1994). He has recorded two volumes of duets with Susannah Hoffs, *Under the Covers I* and *II*, and his most recent solo album is *Sunshine Lies* (2008). Sweet is also a skilled potter.

Over the years, **the praise for *Girlfriend* has been effusive.** “Sweet is one sharp fool. While quivering at times like a teenager gripped by a fearsome crush, he’s actually a knowing lover – the spirit of his songs suggests a grown-up Everly Brothers, straining still to be starry-eyed but savvy enough to have survived love’s disenchantments,” writes *Rolling Stone*. “Musically, Sweet is equally adept at balancing the tough and the tender... This is popcraft raised to the level of artistry.” And the *New York Observer* calls it “one of the most memorable pop records of the past decade: a simple, earnest, yet occasionally gorgeous collection of hook-laden songs about over-the-moon love and bittersweet heartache. Also known for its photograph of fur-wrapped Tuesday Weld on its cover, *Girlfriend* was the pretty record that everyone played when they were pretending to be listening to Nirvana – and its success immediately made Mr. Sweet, an apple-cheeked Nebraskan, a most unlikely rock star.”

**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. Almond is a composer, lyricist, and playwright whose musicals include *Ahraihsak* with director Rubén Polendo, *Kansas City Choir Boy* with director Sam Gold, and the award-winning *People Like Us* with director Gus Kaikkonen. His upcoming shows include *On the Levee*, coming to LCT3 this summer with playwright Marcus Gardley and director Lear deBessonet, and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* with playwright Adam Bock. Almond served as music director for the world premiere of Michael John LaChiusa’s *Tres Niñas*, and he has written musicals for Juilliard and New York University. He has also music-directed and reconceived classic works, most notably the “bald” *Hair* at the Skirball Cultural Center. In addition to having some of the theatre world’s top singers perform his music, including Laura Benanti, Victoria Clark, Jayne Houdyshell, Cheyenne Jackson, and Sherie Rene Scott, Almond regularly performs his own material in New York City’s

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top venues. He has been an artist-in-residence at the Orchard Project, Sundance (both in Utah and Wyoming), and Vassar College (with New York Theatre Workshop). In collaboration with composer Ellen Mandel, Almond has recorded two albums of songs with text by e.e. cummings, Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats, and other poets. He also recently released *Mexico City*, a CD of original songs. Almond is currently collaborating with Warren Leight and Stafford Arima on a musical adaptation of John Knowles' novel *A Separate Peace*.

**Les Waters** has served as associate artistic director of Berkeley Rep since 2003. In the last five years, his shows have ranked among the year's best in *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Time Out New York*, *Time Magazine*, and *USA Today*. Waters has a history of collaborating with prominent playwrights like Caryl Churchill, Charles Mee, and Wallace Shawn, and champions important new voices such as Will Eno, Jordan Harrison, Sarah Ruhl, and Anne Washburn. Last year, Waters made his Broadway debut with *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, which began in Berkeley. His other credits at Berkeley Rep include the world premieres of *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West*, *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *Finn in the Underworld*, and *To the Lighthouse*; the American premiere of *TRAGEDY: a tragedy*; the West Coast premiere of *Eurydice*; and extended runs of *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Pillowman*, and *Yellowman*. He won an Obie Award for *Big Love*, staging its premiere at the Humana Festival and subsequent runs at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Berkeley Rep, the Goodman Theatre, and Long Wharf Theatre. His New York credits also include Classic Stage Company, the Connelly Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, The Public Theater, Second Stage Theatre, and Signature Theatre Company. Elsewhere in America, he has directed for ACT/Seattle, American Conservatory Theater, American Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage, the Guthrie Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, the Mark Taper Forum, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and Yale Repertory Theatre. In his native England, Waters worked with the Bristol Old Vic, Hampstead Theatre Club, Joint Stock Theatre Group, National Theatre, Royal Court Theatre, and Traverse Theatre Club. Waters led the MFA directing program at the University of California, San Diego and is an associate artist of The Civilians, a theatre group based in New York. His many honors include a Drama-Logue Award, an Edinburgh Fringe First Award, a KPBS Patte, and several awards from critics' circles in the Bay Area, Connecticut, and Tokyo.

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Waters has chosen two **talented young actors** to portray the young lovers in this show. **Ryder Bach** (Will) has been seen locally in *Harold and Maude: The Musical* at TheatreWorks, *The Sound of Music* at American Musical Theatre of San Jose, and the TheatreWorks workshop of *Girlfriend*. In Los Angeles, where he plays regularly with a band called the Body Parts, he performed in Center Theatre Group's production of *The History Boys* and *Baby It's You* at the Coast Playhouse. **Jason Hite** (Mike) recently played Mark Cohen in *Rent* for Golden State Theatre Productions. He has also worked with Center Repertory Company, Contra Costa Musical Theatre, and EXIT Stage Left. He trained at the Young REP Theatre Workshop in Walnut Creek and is a proud member of the Fantasy Forum Actors Ensemble.

The cast shares the stage with a **live band** featuring top local musicians. **Shelley Doty** (lead guitarist) has years of touring and recording under her belt, but she currently sticks close to home and performs relentlessly with Clair, Shelley Doty X-tet, and Sistas in the Pit. She also plays lead guitar for indie luminaries Alexis Harte, Bonfire Madigan, Shana Morrison, and Pyeng Threadgill. **ieela Grant** (drummer) is the founder and drummer for Sistas in the Pit. Her passion for music has taken her to China and Switzerland, as well as on a national tour with Iggy Pop and the Stooges. She has enjoyed sharing the stage with musical greats ranging from Bad Brains to Macy Gray. **Jean DuSablón** (bassist) has played with the bands Clair, Girls in the Nose, and Rebecca Riots, and collaborated with musicians like Rachel Garlin, Diana Jones, and Kristi Martel. Her acting credits include the I Love Lezzie Comedy Troupe at Theatre Rhinoceros and *The Sheep and the Ranch Hand*, a short which premiered at the San Francisco International GLBT Film Festival. **Julie Wolf** (music director, rhythm guitarist, and keyboard player) is a multi-instrumentalist and composer who runs Sonic Wolf Productions in Oakland. She has collaborated with Bruce Cockburn, Ani DiFranco, the Indigo Girls, Maceo Parker, Amy Ray, and Sia, among many others. Her work has been heard on stages around the world, in the documentary film *Sweet Crude*, and on a growing number of critically acclaimed recordings.

Waters has also gathered a **distinguished team of designers** to bring his *Girlfriend* to life. **David Zinn** (scenic and costume designer) received an Obie Award for Sustained Achievement in 2008. He created costumes for Berkeley Rep's productions of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and *Mother Courage*, as well as the Berkeley and Broadway productions of *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*. His other credits include *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Xanadu* on Broadway and numerous shows off Broadway, with regional theatres, and at opera companies nationwide.

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**Japhy Weideman** (lighting designer) has worked locally on *Curse of the Starving Class* at A.C.T. and *A Picasso* at San Jose Repertory Theatre. He has extensive experience off Broadway, has worked with regional theatres and opera companies across the country, and has designed shows in Britain, France, Greece, Holland, and Italy. **Jake Rodriguez** (sound designer) is working on his fourth world premiere at Berkeley Rep, following *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *Passing Strange*, and *The People's Temple*. His latest local credits include *Blackbird*, *Rock 'n' Roll*, and *Speed the Plow* at A.C.T.; *Salomé* at Aurora Theatre Company; *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, and *The Tempest* at California Shakespeare Theater; and *Oedipus El Rey* at Magic Theatre. The stage manager for this show is **Michael Suenkel**, Berkeley Rep's resident production stage manager.

During the run of *Girlfriend*, theatregoers and their sweethearts can enjoy **27 special events**:

- *Low-cost previews* take place on Friday, April 9; Saturday, April 10; Sunday, April 11; and Tuesday, April 13.
- *30 Below* – the coolest night of theatre for the under-30 crowd – returns on Friday, April 9. Enjoy the performance at 8:00 PM and a wild post-show party featuring food from Meridian International Sports Café and free drinks from Pyramid Brewery and Raymond Vineyards. Tickets start at only \$13.50 for anyone under 30 years old
- *Opening night* festivities are held on Wednesday, April 14, including a pre-show dinner for donors at Bistro Liaison and a post-show party for the audience catered by Tomatina and Raymond Vineyards.
- *night/OUT* on Thursday, April 15 welcomes the LGBT community. This post-show dance party features food from Tomatina and complimentary beverages provided by Raymond Vineyards and Triple Rock Brewery.
- *Teen Night* begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, April 16 and includes dinner, a behind-the-scenes discussion with a member of the artistic team, and a performance of *Girlfriend*. Tickets are only \$10 for high-school students. For details, call (510) 647-2972 or e-mail [school@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:school@berkeleyrep.org).
- Free 30-minute *docent presentations* about the show take place at 7:00 PM on the following Tuesday and Thursday evenings: April 13, April 15, April 20, April 22, April 27, April 29, May 4, and May 6.

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- *Post-play discussions* moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, April 15; Friday, April 23; and Tuesday, April 27.
- And, on select evenings, patrons can whet their palates for the play with *free tastings* from these culinary artisans one hour before curtain: Ale Industries on April 16 and April 18; Artesa Vineyards and Winery on April 17, April 24, April 30, and May 2; the Berkeley Farmers Market on April 25; and Meridian on May 1.

**Get a ticket for your *Girlfriend!*** Seats start at only \$27. Additional savings are available for groups, seniors, students, and anyone under 30 years of age – meaning **discounted tickets** can be obtained for as little as \$13.50. These 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.

So make a date with Berkeley Rep. **The 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. In four decades, four million people have enjoyed more than 300 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 53 world premieres. Known for its core values of innovation and excellence, as well as its educated and adventurous audience, Berkeley Rep provides a safe haven for emerging and established artists to explore new ideas. Its vital and versatile facility – which includes the 400-seat Thrust Stage, the 600-seat Roda Theatre, and the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre – is the linchpin of a bustling arts district that has helped revitalize downtown Berkeley. In recognition of its place on the national stage, Berkeley Rep was honored with the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. In the last five years alone, the company has helped send five shows to Broadway: *American Idiot*, *Bridge & Tunnel*, *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, *Passing Strange*, and *Wishful Drinking*. A not-for-profit organization, 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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**GIRLFRIEND**  
FACT SHEET

**WHO:** Book by Todd Almond  
 Music and lyrics by Matthew Sweet  
 Directed by Les Waters  
 Designed by David Zinn (sets and costumes), Japhy Weideman (lights), and Jake Rodriguez (sound)  
 Starring Ryder Bach (Will) and Jason Hite (Mike)  
 Featuring a live band with Shelley Doty (lead guitar), ieela Grant (drums), Jean DuSablón (bass), and Julie Wolf (music director, rhythm guitar, and keyboards)

**WHAT:** *Girlfriend*, a romantic new musical wound around love songs from the landmark album

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

**WHEN:** **April 9 – May 9, 2010**

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

**Special Events:**

Low-cost previews: Friday 4/9, Saturday 4/10 & Tuesday 4/13 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 4/11 @ 7:00 PM  
30 Below (party for those under 30): Friday 4/9 @ 8:00 PM  
Opening night: Wednesday 4/14 @ 8:00 PM  
night/OUT (LGBT party): Thursday 4/15 @ 8:00 PM  
Teen night: Friday 4/16 @ 6:30 PM  
Pre-show docent talks: Tuesdays 4/13, 4/20, 4/27 & 5/4 and Thursdays 4/15, 4/22, 4/29 & 5/6 @ 7:00 PM  
Post-play discussions: Thursday 4/15, Friday 4/23, and Tuesday 4/27 @ 8:00 PM  
Free tastings: Fridays 4/16 (Ale Industries) & 4/30 (Artesa Vineyards) @ 7:00 PM; Saturdays 4/17 (Artesa), 4/24 (Artesa) & 5/1 (Meridian) @ 7:00 PM; and Sundays 4/25 (Berkeley Farmers Market) & 5/2 (Artesa) @ 6:00 PM

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

■ PREVIEW  
 ■ TEEN NIGHT  
 ■ OPENING NIGHT  
 ■ LGBT NIGHT/OUT  
 ■ 30 BELOW  
 ■ POST-SHOW DISCUSSION  
 ■ TASTING  
 ■ DOCENT PRESENTATIONS EVERY TUE & THU 7PM

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

	Section B	Section A	Premium
Previews .....	\$27	\$34	\$39
Tue 8 PM / Wed 7 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-10gf.asp>

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