

DECEMBER 28, 2009

BERKELEY REP'S PLAYS NAMED AMONG DECADE'S BEST BY NATION'S TOP CRITICS

Happy New Year to you and yours!

It certainly has been quite a year here at Berkeley Rep:

- Another two shows developed at Berkeley Rep landed on Broadway: Carrie Fisher's *Wishful Drinking* and Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*.
- *Wishful Drinking* also became a bestseller – and earned its author a Grammy nomination for her audio book!
- Spike Lee released his film of *Passing Strange*, and Green Day released a new version of the song “21 Guns” featuring the cast from our blockbuster production of *American Idiot*.
- With our daring array of plays, we continued to break box-office records in Berkeley even as our shows toured to Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, and other cities.

We're grateful for your support in 2009, and thrilled to share with you the accolades we've received as the decade draws to a close:

- In today's [San Francisco Chronicle](#), Robert Hurwitt asserts that “the rise of Berkeley Repertory Theatre” was the Top Theatre Story of the Decade! “The Rep opened its new Roda Theatre in '01, allowing it longer runs and greater flexibility with two mainstages, and has quickly risen in local and national prestige. Under the leadership of Tony Taccone and his associate artistic director Les Waters, it's become one of the region's two flagship companies and a primary source of new work for Broadway (where Taccone and Waters each opened a show this fall) and the rest of the country.”

In 2009, we were proud to premiere an unconventional comedy called *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* – and even prouder when Associate Artistic Director Les Waters made his Broadway debut with Sarah's script this fall. The play that we commissioned proved popular with the nation's most prominent theatre critics:

- **Elysa Gardner named it Best Play of the Year in [USA Today](#):** “Broadway newbie Sarah Ruhl defied gender and genre orthodoxy to give us a hilarious and moving meditation on the many factors that complicate communication between (and within) the sexes.”
- **In [The New Yorker](#), John Lahr proclaimed it the Top Moment in Theater for 2009:** “Ruhl's benign detachment, her astute mind, and her capacity for wonder turn this evening into an indelible pleasure. In Les Waters, who directed her exciting *Eurydice* a few seasons back, she has found an expert collaborator. The play builds from a comedy of manners into a vision of sexual harmony. In doing this, it actually moves the comedy of manners into new aesthetic and thematic territory. *In the Next Room* is not only Ruhl's best play in her short, distinguished career, but time may prove it to be a great play. If *In the Next Room* doesn't win the Tony for best play – it's Ruhl's first Broadway show – I'll eat my shorts.”

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RECIPIENT OF THE TONY AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING REGIONAL THEATRE

- And Charles Isherwood of the [New York Times](#) declared it one of “the four best new plays to be produced in New York this year.” He calls it “a wonderfully daring, serious-minded sex comedy about the fundamental lack of understanding between men and women in the post-gaslight era (and, by extension, our own).” That’s four straight years in which a show developed at Berkeley Rep made his list!

Passing Strange, the provocative rock musical that premiered at Berkeley Rep several years back, also continued its long, strange trip this year. Spike Lee released his documentary of our Broadway production, and **both film critics from the [Associated Press](#) ranked *Passing Strange* among the Top 10 Films of 2009:**

- David Germain: “Spike Lee oversees a blast of stage energy, his filmed version of the Broadway show so up-close and intimate that the players’ sweat practically drips onto the audiences’ lap. Musician Stew is the big-voiced master of ceremonies for his play, whose final performances Lee filmed to craft the movie. The small cast leaps seamlessly through multiple roles as they trace an artistic young black man’s journey to find his creative soul with grand humor, deep insight and songs that truly rock.”
- Christy Lemire: “It’s easy to see why Spike Lee was drawn to Stew, the one-named musician and mastermind behind the Broadway production *Passing Strange*. Like Lee, the artist formerly known as Mark Stewart possesses a powerful and singular voice, one he uses to express vividly his own experience of growing up black in America. In bringing Stew’s Tony-winning musical to the screen, Lee took the wise and uncharacteristic step of staying out of the way. The crisp, intimate result makes you feel as if you’re on stage with Stew and his formidable cast.”

If you haven’t already seen the film, [the DVD becomes available on January 12](#) and [PBS begins airing it on January 13](#).

Finally, here at home, critics continue to rank our shows among the year’s best:

- Charles McNulty of the [LA Times](#) placed our production of *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* among the Top 10 of 2009: “Sarah Ruhl’s latest drama is so flush with insight into the question that flummoxed Freud about what women want that it was impossible not to revel in the playwright’s singularly quirky imagination.” He also mentions that show – and *Passing Strange* – in his article looking back at [the decade’s best theatre](#).
- Three of our shows made Karen D’Souza’s Top 10 for the [San Jose Mercury News](#), [Contra Costa Times](#), and [Oakland Tribune](#). Karen’s list starts with *In the Next Room* and also includes *American Idiot* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*.
- Robert Hurwitt chose *Inishmore* for his own Top 10 in the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), calling it “a penetrating and hilariously timely dissection of man’s inhumanity to man – and cats.” Rob Avila named the show among his favorites of the year in the [SF Bay Guardian](#) as well.

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CRITICS NAME BERKELEY REP AMONG DECADE'S BEST / 3 OF 3

- And two of our shows ranked among Rachel Swan's Top 10 in the [East Bay Express](#): *Aurélia's Oratorio* is "tantamount to stepping inside a dream" and *American Idiot* "was certainly a knockout show... You never thought it would happen, but this year an East Bay theater production – an opera no less – actually graced the pages of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Indeed, this was the year of Green Day's *American Idiot*, a dizzying production that gave director Michael Mayer newfound pop-culture currency while bringing an East Bay punk band into the high-art realm."

Thank you for your ongoing support of the theatrical risks we take at Berkeley Rep. We couldn't do it without you.

All the best for 2010,
TK

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