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BERKELEY REP RECEIVES AMERICAN EXPRESS GRANT FOR FELLOWSHIPS

Best and brightest from colleges across the country enter prestigious training program

JULY 6, 2009 – Today Berkeley Repertory Theatre announced that **16 emerging leaders** from across the nation – **including six Northern California natives** – have been awarded fellowships for the upcoming season. This year's fellowships will be supported by a **generous \$50,000 grant** from American Express, complementing a similar gift received earlier from the Koret Foundation. Every year, through this esteemed training program, college graduates from across America develop their leadership skills by working alongside accomplished professionals and renowned artists at this Tony Award-winning theatre.

This class of fellows joins Berkeley Rep as it prepares seven daring new shows: the world premiere of *American Idiot* from **Green Day** and **Michael Mayer**, the world premiere of *Girlfriend from Todd Almond* and **Matthew Sweet**, the world premiere of *Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West* from **Naomi Iizuka** and **Les Waters**, 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*.

"In these difficult times, we are truly grateful for the support of American Express and the Koret Foundation, who recognize that investing in the artists, artisans, and administrators of tomorrow is the only way to ensure the continued health of the American theatre," said Managing Director **Susan Medak**. "With the ambitious collection of plays that Tony [Taccone] has picked for the coming season, it's going to be a particularly good year to be a fellow at Berkeley Rep."

"At American Express, we recognize the impact that nonprofit leaders have on business, society, and their local communities," added **Timothy J. McClimon**, president of the American Express Foundation. "We are pleased to support Berkeley Repertory Theatre's fellowship program to nurture future nonprofit leaders by providing them with the opportunity to build and hone leadership skills that are critical to the sector."

Fellowships at Berkeley Rep combine hands-on practical experience with educational seminars that provide insight into the operation and inner workings of a professional theatre. The program, one of the nation's most prestigious and most extensive, offers training in more than a dozen different disciplines. Fellows make an 11-month commitment to the Theatre, generally starting work in August and concluding their residencies in June. They receive a stipend for their service, as well as housing. The partnership between Berkeley Rep and the fellowship recipient provides invaluable experience and professional contacts; as a result, participants go on to work at prominent theatres across the nation. More than 20% of Berkeley Rep's staff members are former fellows, and a full two-thirds of past fellows continue to work professionally in the industry.

For the past two years, to help raise awareness about career opportunities in theatre, Berkeley Rep has hired an outreach coordinator to travel to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and recruit for its fellowship program. In addition, drama department chairs from several of these schools will visit the Theatre this year, to build relationships and better prepare their students to meet the demands of the program. This **commitment to diversity** appealed to funders like American Express and the Koret Foundation, and has also attracted the attention of other

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theatres. Next year, the Goodman Theatre of Chicago will partner with Berkeley Rep to participate in the same process. As the program grows, Berkeley Rep intends to reach and recruit from other communities that are underrepresented among the pool of theatre workers nationwide.

Fellowships for the 2009/10 Season at Berkeley Rep have been awarded to the following 16 young people:

- **Matthew Avery**, a native of Milwaukee and graduate of Drake University, will work with Master Electrician Fred Geffken and the electrics crew.
- **Beryl E. Baker**, a native of Alameda and graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, will work with Sound Engineer Heather Bradley and the sound department.
- **A. Euphrates Dahout**, a native of San Jose and graduate of Reed College, will work with Company Manager Megan Wygant.
- **Silvie Deutsch**, a native of Davenport, CA and graduate of Wesleyan University, will work with Costume Director Maggi Yule in the costume shop.
- **Seth Fly**, a Texas native and graduate of Rice University, will work with Technical Director Jim Smith in the scene shop.
- **Alexandra Friedman**, a Russian native raised in New York City, graduated from Brandeis University and will work with Scenic Artist Lisa Lázár.
- **Elizabeth A. Guzman**, a native of Highland Mills, NY and graduate of SUNY New Paltz, will work with School Administrator Emika Abe in the School of Theatre.
- **Emily Hartman**, a native of El Cerrito and graduate of UC Davis, will work with Production Stage Manager Michael Suenkel.
- **Elana McKernan**, a native of Fallbrook, CA and graduate of Reed College, will work with Director of Marketing and Communications Robert Sweibel.
- **Nora Merezicky**, an Ohio native and graduate of Ohio University, will work with Art Director Cheshire Isaacs.
- **Mina Morita**, a native of Berkeley and graduate of New York University, will serve a second year as the Bret C. Harte Directing Fellow under Artistic Director Tony Taccone.
- **Sarah Nowicki**, a native of Phoenix and graduate of Northern Arizona University, will work with Director of Development Lynn Eve Komaromi.
- **Anna Victoria Peralta**, a native of West Sacramento and graduate of San Francisco State University, will work with Properties Manager Ashley Dawn in the prop shop.
- **Kashara Robinson**, a native of Dallas and graduate of Spelman College, will work with Rachel Fink, director of the School of Theatre.
- **Rachel Viola**, a native of Brooklyn and graduate of NYU, will work with Literary Manager Madeleine Oldham.
- **Katherine Wepler**, an Indiana native and graduate of Ohio Northern University, will work with Production Manager Tom Pearl.

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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 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.

See tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep. Subscribe now for *American Idiot* and an entire season of new plays; inviting prices ensure that everyone can attend. For more information, call the box office at (510) 647.2949 or toll-free at (888) 4-BRT-Tix – or simply click berkeleyrep.org.

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