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## **BERKELEY REP LAUNCHES SUMMER LAB WITH 40 OF NATION'S TOP ARTISTS**

**13 innovative projects are invited to The Ground Floor, a new R&D facility for theatre**

APRIL 9, 2012 – This July, 40 of the nation's most prominent and promising writers, directors, and composers will be in residence at Berkeley Repertory Theatre in an **extraordinary new laboratory for collaboration**. Today, the renowned nonprofit announced 13 selections for the inaugural summer lab at The Ground Floor, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work. During an intense four-week period, dozens of artists will live, dine, create, and collaborate at the Theatre's new campus in West Berkeley. Seed money for these activities is provided by a \$1 million grant from the James Irvine Foundation's Artistic Innovation Fund and a \$750,000 grant from ArtPlace.

Residencies ranging from four days to three weeks have been awarded to local, national, and international artists including **Julia Cho, David Edgar, Amy Freed, Marcus Gardley, Madeleine George, Jessica Goldberg, Rinne Groff, Lauren Gunderson, Danny Hoch, Naomi Iizuka, Erin Kamler, Kathryn Keats, Carson Kretzer, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Dan LeFranc, Ellen McLaughlin, Michael Mitnick, Richard Montoya, Itamar Moses, Peter Sinn Nachtrieb, Lynn Nottage, Dominic Orlando, Greg Pierotti, Amelia Roper, Erika Chong Shuch, Octavio Solis, Heidi Stillman, and Meiyin Wang.**

Joining them to work on projects at The Ground Floor are directors, designers, musicians, and performers such as **Matthias Bossi, Dexter Bullard, Brian Carpenter, Nils Frykdahl, Warren David Keith, Leigh Silverman, Tony Taccone, Eric Ting, Mark Valadez, and Beth Wilmurt** – as well as dozens of local and out-of-town actors.

"It's tremendously exciting to gather so many artists of this caliber in one place at one time for one purpose: to make art," says Taccone, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. "This is a huge leap for us. We've been commissioning and developing plays for years – 61 world premieres at last count. By launching The Ground Floor we're transforming our approach to creating new work, and devoting more time, space, and resources to this part of the artistic process. The summer lab brings all these efforts **under one roof right here in Berkeley**. I can't wait."

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**The Ground Floor**, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work, is a bold new initiative designed to raise the bar on the Tony Award-winning nonprofit's already successful record of artistic innovation. Think of it as **an incubator for theatrical start-ups** or **a top-notch R&D facility for artists**. The Ground Floor promotes cross-pollination among artists and champions the spirit of innovation inherent to Berkeley and the Bay Area.

This new program became possible when Berkeley Rep united all its preproduction activities – its costume shop, prop shop, scene shop, and offices – at a spacious campus in West Berkeley. The Theatre is transforming a vacant warehouse on that site into **a vibrant new creative center** that will ultimately include rehearsal halls, intimate studios, and perhaps even housing for visiting artists. The result will be a dynamic home for play creation – an organic and energetic environment for artists where they can live, develop work in a flexible setting, challenge each other to expand the boundaries of theatre, and intersect with the public to create community. The leaders of this effort are **Madeleine Oldham**, Berkeley Rep's resident dramaturg and director of The Ground Floor, and **Meghan Pressman**, Berkeley Rep's associate managing director and managing director of The Ground Floor.

"It is a true honor to be entrusted with the artistic leadership of this program," says Oldham, who has been the literary manager at Berkeley Rep for the past seven years and has been named director of The Ground Floor. "I look forward to expanding our new-work development program, bringing all these activities home to Berkeley, and infusing them with the **creative, collaborative, forward-thinking, and risk-taking** qualities that are hallmarks of life in the Bay Area."

Get in on The Ground Floor! Here is an alphabetical list of the artists selected for the inaugural summer lab, along with a description of each project:

### **20 writers: The Food Project**

From seed to table and beyond, the Food Project envisions a sweeping cycle of short scripts that explore our intricate relationship with what we eat. The Ground Floor launches this epic theatrical event by breaking bread with 20 respected writers: **Julia Cho** (*The Language Archive*, *The Piano Teacher*), **David Edgar** (*Continental Divide*, *Pentecost*), **Amy Freed** (*Freedomland*, *You, Nero*), **Jessica Goldberg** (*Just War*, *Refuge*), **Rinne Groff** (*Compulsion*, *The Ruby Sunrise*), **Lauren Gunderson** (*Exit*, *Pursued by a Bear*, *Silent Sky*), **Danny Hoch** (*Jails*, *Hospitals & Hip-*

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*Hop; Taking Over*), **Naomi Iizuka** (*36 Views, Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West*), **Kwame Kwei-Armah** (*Elmina's Kitchen, Let There Be Love*), **Ellen McLaughlin** (*The Persians, Tongue of a Bird*), **Richard Montoya** (*Water and Power, Zorro in Hell*), **Itamar Moses** (*Bach at Leipzig, Yellowjackets*), **Peter Sinn Nachtrieb** (*Boom, Hunter Gatherers*), **Lynn Nottage** (*Intimate Apparel, Ruined*), **Erika Chong Shuch** (*After All, Love Everywhere*), **Octavio Solis** (*Gibraltar, Lydia*), and four playwrights yet to be named. Joined in Berkeley by director **Tony Taccone**, this group immerses itself in four days of culinary investigations that range freely from lectures to field trips on the way to a buffet of short plays.

### **Marcus Gardley: *The House that Will Not Stand***

Winner of the PEN/Laura Pels Award for Mid-Career Playwrights, Marcus Gardley's scripts include *Every Tongue Confess*, *On the Levee*, and *This World in a Woman's Hands*. Now Berkeley Rep has commissioned a new play, and Gardley comes to The Ground Floor to shape it with an ensemble of eight actors. Set in New Orleans in 1836, exactly 100 years before *The House of Bernarda Alba*, this loose adaptation examines the lives of free women of color who lived under the complex system of *plaçage*, common-law marriages between white men and black Creole women.

### **Madeleine George: *The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence***

Author of *Precious Little*, *Seven Homeless Mammoths Wander New England*, and *The Zero Hour*, Madeleine George is the recipient of the Princess Grace Playwriting Award and other honors. The Ground Floor hosts her, along with director **Leigh Silverman** (*Chinglish, In the Wake*) and five actors, for revisions and readings of her latest script: *The (curious case of the) Watson Intelligence*. Separated by a century, three famous Watsons work to solve a pair of mysteries that resolve, kaleidoscopically, into a single techno-love story. Alexander Graham Bell's assistant, Sherlock Holmes' sidekick, and the supercomputer that won on *Jeopardy!* join forces for a romantic thriller about intelligence, interdependence, and artificial forms of both.

### **Kathryn Keats: *The Hummingbird***

In the early '80s, Kathryn Keats was a promising young musician who had performed off Broadway and on television. But for nearly two decades she hid under an assumed identity because her boyfriend's schizophrenia transformed him from a beloved collaborator into a

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homicidal stranger. When he died, Keats began writing music again, releasing an album called *After the Silence*. Now she's creating a show that follows her desperate attempts to save the man she loved... and then her courageous efforts to save herself. The Ground Floor welcomes this Marin singer who survived the crucible of violence and refused to surrender.

**Carson Kreitzer & Erin Kamler: *Runway 69***

Two weeks. Two collaborators. One room with a piano. Carson Kreitzer and Erin Kamler enter The Ground Floor for 14 days of intense focus on their new musical. *Runway 69* is a provocative story about one of the raunchiest strip clubs in New York, seen through song on the eve of the clean-up that transformed Times Square. Kreitzer's previous plays include *Behind the Eye*, *The Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, and *Self Defense*. Erin Kamler – three-time winner of Stephen Sondheim's Young Playwrights Festival – wrote the book, music, and lyrics for *Divorce! The Musical*.

**Dan LeFranc: *Troublemaker, or The Freakin' Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright***

Presented with the *New York Times* Outstanding Playwright Award for *Sixty Miles to Silver Lake*, Dan LeFranc recently attracted attention with his off-Broadway production of *The Big Meal*. Now he gets in on The Ground Floor for a play commissioned by Berkeley Rep: *Troublemaker, or The Freakin' Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright*. In working-class Rhode Island, Bradley and his bestest friend tangle with rich kid Jake Miller and some middle-school goons. In preparation for *Troublemaker's* premiere next year on the Thrust Stage, LeFranc teams up with director **Dexter Bullard** (*Bug, Mistakes Were Made*) and a nine-person ensemble for a two-week workshop of this irresistible show.

**Michael Mitnick: *Little Boy Blue***

Can a playwright plan the perfect crime? Michael Mitnick – the author of *Fly by Night*, *Sex Lives of Our Parents*, and *Spacebar: A Broadway Play by Kyle Sugarman* – holes up at Berkeley Rep to concentrate on his new script. *Little Boy Blue* is a new thriller centered on a traceless murder, and The Ground Floor offers Mitnick the time and space to hone his tale.

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**Dominic Orlando: *The Barbary Coast***

Dominic Orlando's scripts include *Danny Casolaro Died for You*, *Juan Gelion Dances for the Sun*, and *A Short Play About 9/11*. He joins The Ground Floor to continue developing a musical commissioned by Berkeley Rep. *The Barbary Coast* lures audiences into the criminal culture that thrived in San Francisco during the Gold Rush. Rooted in history, it's a vibrant, violent, theatrical portrayal of a savory slice of California history. For 10 days, Orlando works on this *Coast* with composer **Brian Carpenter** of the Boston-based band Beat Circus.

**Greg Pierotti: *Apology***

A member of Tectonic Theatre Project, Greg Pierotti was co-writer of *The Laramie Project*, head writer for *The People's Temple*, and co-writer of *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*. His new work relies on thousands of phone messages left on the Apology Line, an art piece created by Allan Bridge that invited people to anonymously admit their crimes and errors on his answering machine. Imagining Bridge's life amidst the endless stream of confessions, *Apology* is a play accompanied by an interactive installation. At The Ground Floor, Pierotti works on the script's narrative structure with the help of eight collaborators.

**Amelia Roper: *She Rode Horses Like the Stock Exchange***

Amelia Roper is an award-winning Australian playwright best known for her plays *Big Sky Town*, *Camberwell House*, and *Hong Kong Dinosaur*. Her residency at The Ground Floor allows her to revise and expand a script she wrote while studying at Yale School of Drama. *She Rode Horses Like the Stock Exchange* is an absurdly funny and terrifying ride through downsized, foreclosed America. In a nice New England park, in a nice New England city, two nice New England couples try very, very hard to be nice to each other... while the world around them falls apart.

**The Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project: *After All***

The Erika Chong Shuch Performance Project is a resident company at Intersection for the Arts, where it has premiered a new piece every year for the last decade including *51802*, *Sitting in a Circle*, and *Sunday Will Come*. A two-week workshop at The Ground Floor provides the company with a rare opportunity to revisit and refine a successful show from the past. Co-conceived by Shuch and **Allen Willner**, *After All* employs text by **Michelle Carter** as well as **Octavio Solis** and **Philip Kan Gotanda** to explore four characters wrestling with the inevitability of time passing. As director and choreographer, Shuch dives back into the show with eight performers – including **Matthias Bossi**, **Nils Frykdahl**, **Warren David Keith**, and **Beth Wilmurt**.

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**Heidi Stillman: *The North China Lover***

Artistic director of new work at Lookingglass Theatre Company, Heidi Stillman has adapted numerous novels for the stage including *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Hard Times*, and *The Master and Margarita*. Now she turns her hand to *The North China Lover*, a frank and fearless story of a girl's sexual awakening and subsequent exile. Born in French Indochina, Marguerite Duras based her book on incidents in her own life – so Stillman places the author at the center of her tale. She and a cast of eight actors spend a week working on that story this summer at The Ground Floor.

**Meiyin Wang: *motherland / foreign relations (we all here, why you never call?)***

Known in New York and Singapore as a director, and as associate producer of the Under the Radar Festival, Meiyin Wang conducted secret interviews with her mother to create her latest show: *motherland / foreign relations* is a performance for two people and a rotating panel of guests that examines modern China through the subversive interrogation of mundane history. Part lecture, part interview, part cooking show, it uses newspaper headlines, electronic translation, and delicious dumplings to ask, “What is the appropriate way to map human history?” Wang refines the piece at The Ground Floor with the help of director **Eric Ting** (*Agnes Under the Big Top*, *The Old Man and the Sea*) and sound designer **Mark Valadez** (*Reluctant*, *The Verge*).

The Ground Floor aims to create a truly safe space for artists that is not influenced by the pressure of imminent public exposure, so – unlike many other labs – it does not require recipients to present a reading or performance at the end of their residencies. Nonetheless, some projects may reach a stage where the creators request an invited audience or even engage community members as collaborators. **For more information** on each project, and for future announcements of opportunities to interact, watch the website at [berkeleyrep.org/groundfloor](http://berkeleyrep.org/groundfloor).

**ABOUT BERKELEY REP**

Berkeley Repertory Theatre has grown from a storefront stage to a national leader in innovative theatre. Known for its core values of imagination and excellence, as well as its educated and adventurous audience, the nonprofit has provided a welcoming home for emerging and established artists since 1968. With two stages, a school, and a Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, Berkeley Rep is proud to premiere exhilarating new plays. In the last six years, the company has helped send six shows to Broadway. Seven more landed off Broadway, one moved to London, two turned into films, and others have toured the nation. Come see tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep.

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