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For Immediate Release

BERKELEY REP ANNOUNCES FULL CAST FOR *KISS MY AZTEC!*

Tony Award winner John Leguizamo teams with Tony Taccone on world premiere musical

March 28, 2019 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre today announced the full cast for the world premiere of *Kiss My Aztec!* John Leguizamo teams up with Artistic Director Tony Taccone for this musical comedy, following their collaboration on the hit one-man show *Latin History for Morons*, which received its world premiere at Berkeley Rep before heading to Broadway. Leguizamo will serve as co-writer and co-lyricist only for *Kiss My Aztec!* — 11 other talented actors will perform in this production. Taccone will also direct.

In addition to the book by Leguizamo and Taccone, the creative team includes **Benjamin Velez** (music, lyrics and arranger), **David Kamp** (lyrics), **David Gardos** (music supervisor), **Simon Hale** (orchestrator), **Maija García** (choreography), **Clint Ramos** (scenic and costume design), **Alexander V. Nichols** (lighting design), and **Jessica Paz** (sound design). Additional percussion arrangements by Wilson Torres. The musical is based on an original screenplay written by John Leguizamo and Stephen Chbosky. Casting for *Kiss My Aztec!* is provided by Tara Rubin Casting.

“It’s been fantastic to collaborate with John on another show that not only keeps the audience laughing but finds a creative way to explore Latinx culture,” says Artistic Director Tony Taccone. “Working together allows us to channel our obsessive imaginations, whacked-out senses of humor, and shared yearning to be honest. We’re thrilled to be creating with the immensely talented Benjamin Velez, David Kamp, and Maija García, and couldn’t be happier with this hilarious, adventuresome cast. May the Force be with us.”

The fresh, irreverent musical comedy *Kiss My Aztec!* fuses salsa, Latin boogaloo, hip-hop, gospel, funk, merengue, and an inspired mash-up of Elizabethan dialect and modern slang to celebrate, elevate, and commemorate Latinx culture.

European conquest? Hell, no! It may be the 16th century in Spanish-occupied Mesoamerica, but these Aztecs is woke. Led by the unlikely duo of Colombina (a fierce warrior) and Pepe (a not-so-fierce clown), they mount a scrappy resistance against their Spanish oppressors — and somehow get entangled in the dysfunctional dynamics of the Spanish viceroy’s bickering family. Will our heroes get conquistadored by whitey or win the day?

Before *Kiss My Aztec!* performances start this summer, audiences can get a behind-the-scenes look at the show at Berkeley Rep’s **Page to Stage** event featuring a discussion with Leguizamo, Taccone, and Dramaturg Madeleine Oldham. This free event takes place on **Monday, April 15, 2019, at 7pm in the Roda Theatre.**

Previews for *Kiss My Aztec!* begin Tuesday, May 28, 2019 and the show runs through **Sunday, July 14, 2019**. Press day will be **Thursday, June 6, 2019**. Ticket prices for the run start at \$40, and can be purchased online at berkeleyrep.org or by phone at **510 647-2949** (Tue-Sun, noon-7pm).

John Leguizamo (Book/Lyrics) Multifaceted performer and Emmy Award-winner John Leguizamo’s notable career defies categorization. His work spans the genres of film, theatre, television, literature, and beyond. As writer and performer, John created the off-Broadway sensation *Mambo Mouth* (1991: Obie, Outer Critics Circle, Vanguardia Awards). His second one-man show, *Spic O-Rama* (1993), enjoyed extended sold-out runs in Chicago and New York (Dramatists’ Guild Hull-Warriner Award for Best American Play, Lucille Lortel Outstanding Achievement Award for Best Broadway Performance, Drama Desk Award for Best Solo Performance). His third solo show, *Freak*, completed a successful run on

Broadway in 1998. A special presentation of *Freak*, directed by Spike Lee, aired on HBO (Emmy Award for Outstanding Performance in a Variety or Music Program and nomination for Outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Special). In 2001 John returned to Broadway with *Sexaholix...a Love Story*, directed by Peter Askin (Outer Critics Circle Award nomination for "Outstanding Solo Performance" and Tony Award nomination for Best Special Theatrical Performance). *Sexaholix* aired as an HBO Special in 2002 and toured widely. His most recent one-man show, *Ghetto Klown*, was developed at La Jolla Playhouse (and developed at Berkeley Rep as *Klass Klown*) and went on to Broadway run in 2011. His graphic novel *Ghetto Klown* has been nominated for a 2016 Eisner Award. In 2016, Leguizamo's *Latin History for Morons* (directed by Tony Taccone) had its world premiere at Berkeley Rep. The show was nominated for two Tony Awards in 2018 with Leguizamo being the recipient of a special award for his career.

Tony Taccone (Book/Director/Artistic Director) During Tony's tenure as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, the Tony Award-winning nonprofit has earned a reputation as an international leader in innovative theatre. In those 19 years, Berkeley Rep has presented more than 70 world, American, and West Coast premieres and sent 23 shows to New York, two to London, and one to Hong Kong. Tony has staged more than 40 plays in Berkeley, including new work from Culture Clash, Rinde Eckert, David Edgar, Danny Hoch, Geoff Hoyle, Quincy Long, Itamar Moses, and Lemony Snicket. He directed the shows that transferred to London, *Continental Divide* and *Tiny Kushner*, and two that landed on Broadway as well: *Bridge & Tunnel* and *Wishful Drinking*. Prior to working at Berkeley Rep, Tony served as artistic director of Eureka Theatre, which produced the American premieres of plays by Dario Fo, Caryl Churchill, and David Edgar before focusing on a new generation of American writers. While at the Eureka, Tony commissioned Tony Kushner's legendary *Angels in America* and co-directed its world premiere. He has collaborated with Kushner on eight plays at Berkeley Rep, including *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*. Tony's regional credits include Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, Center Theatre Group, the Eureka Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, the Huntington Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Public Theater, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. As a playwright, he debuted *Ghost Light*, *Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup*, and *Game On*, written with Dan Hoyle. In 2012, Tony received the Margo Jones Award for "demonstrating a significant impact, understanding, and affirmation of playwrighting, with a commitment to the living theatre."

CAST

Angelica Beliard (Ensemble) Angelica is a New Jersey native raised in New York City and is thrilled to be making her Berkeley Rep debut in *Kiss My Aztec!* Most recently she starred as Carmen in an immersive adaptation *Carmen: To Havana and Back* (Public Arts). Angelica made her Broadway debut in the hit musical *On Your Feet!* and then joined the Broadway company of *Summer: The Donna Summer Musical*. Her dance background has led her to be featured in numerous commercials including for Visa, iHome, EBAY, and more.

Chad Carstarphen (El Jaguar Negro/Reymundo) Chad is thrilled to be making his Berkeley Rep debut with *Kiss My Aztec!* His regional and national credits include *Broke-ology* (Kitchen Theatre Company) and the first national tour of *In The Heights*. In NYC, he was seen in the world premieres of *Evensong* (Astoria Performing Arts Center) and *The Conscientious Objector* (the Clurman Theatre at Theatre Row). As an ensemble member of Pregones/Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, productions with the company include *El Bolero Was My Downfall*, *The Desire of the Astronaut*, *The Harlem Hellfighters...*, *Hey Yo! Yo Soy!*, and *Neon Baby*. Chad's film/TV credits include *Landing Up*, *The Pudding Club*, and *Dumped*. He attended New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. @chadcarstarphen

Katherine "KC" de la Cruz (Ensemble) KC is delighted to be making her Berkeley Rep debut. Recent credits include *The Prince of Egypt* (Keturah) with TheatreWorks; *In the Heights* (Nina) with Woodminster Summer Musicals; *Smokey Joe's Café* (DeLee), *The Little Mermaid* (Ariel), and *Les Misérables* (Eponine) with Tri-Valley Repertory Theatre; *West Side Story* (Maria) with City Lights Theatre; and *Miss Saigon* (Kim) with Palo Alto Players. KC has been performing since she was 5 years old and hopes to take her talents and dreams to the Big Apple where she wants to further her theatre career. @Kcdelacruz

Zachary Infante (Fernando/Sebastian/Ensemble) Zach is a New Jersey-based artist grateful to be making their Berkeley Rep debut! Zach was most recently seen as the Dormouse in Duncan Sheik, Steven Sater, and Jessie Nelson's new musical *Alice By Heart* off Broadway at MCC Theater. Other off-Broadway credits include Theatre for a New Audience (Francis Flute in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, dir. Julie Taymor) and *Encores!* at New York City Center. Regional credits include American Repertory Theater (*Fingersmith*, dir. Bill Rauch), The Kennedy Center, Paper Mill Playhouse, Hartford Stage, Two River Theater, and Orlando Shakes (Sonny in *In The Heights*, 2019 Orlando Sentinel Theater Best Supporting Actor nominee). Film/TV: Gordon in *School of Rock*, Carrie Pilby, Gotham, and Alpha House. They are also a creative producing fellow at Musical Theater Factory, in partnership with Playwrights Horizons. They hold a BFA in Drama from NYU Tisch (CAP21 & ETW) and are a proud AEA and SAG-AFTRA member represented by Abrams Artists Agency. @zachinfante

Yani Marin (Colombina) Yani is excited to be making her Berkeley Rep debut, with this extraordinary cast and creative team. Her Broadway credits include *Wicked*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, and *West Side Story* (2009 revival, original cast recording) where she understudied and performed the role of Anita. Her other shows and tours include *Hair* (Hollywood Bowl), *Wicked* (first national), *West Side Story* (international), *The Radio City Christmas Spectacular*, and *The Beyonce Experience* (world tour) as a backup dancer. Most recently Yani had a recurring role in the new series *Jack Ryan* (Amazon Prime) as well as a recurring role on *Empire* (Fox). Other TV credits include *Blue Bloods*, *NCIS LA*, *Criminal Minds*, *One Bad Choice*, and *Smash*. She is a graduate of NYU, Tisch School of the Arts. Currently, Yani is also in pre-production for an independent feature film that she is producing and starring in called *Nice to Meet Me*.

Jesús E. Martínez (Captain Soldier/Ensemble) Jesús has been part of the *Kiss My Aztec!* family since 2014 and he's delighted to debut at Berkeley Rep. Hailing from NYC, he received his BA at SUNY Purchase College and is an ensemble member of Pregones Theatre, Teatro SEA, and Spanish Repertory Theatre. He recently appeared in *Dancing in My Cockroach Killers* (Pregones Theatre), *Sueño: A Latino Take of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Society of the Educational Arts), *In the Name of Salome* (Spanish Repertory Theatre), *Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliette* (La TEA Theatre), which earned him an award from the Hispanic Organization of Latin Actors for his portrayal of Mercutio. His favorite voice acting credits for TV/film include *Blue Bloods* (CBS), *Dora and Friends* (Nickelodeon), *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix), *The First Purge* (Universal), *The Sun Is Also a Star* (Warner Bros), and many others. Twitter/Insta: @mrtznz1393

Maria-Christina Oliveras (Tolima/Ensemble) Maria-Christina is thrilled to be back at Berkeley Rep, having made her debut in the world premiere of *Amélie*, which she subsequently did on Broadway. She was recently seen in the Bay Area at The Curran in David Henry Hwang and Jeanine Tesori's new musical *Soft Power* and Taylor Mac's *24-Decade History of Popular Music*. Broadway credits include *Amélie* (original cast recording), *Machinal*, and *Bloody Andrew Jackson*. Other New York credits include *Here Lies Love* (original cast recording), *Pretty Filthy* (original cast recording), *Romeo and Juliet* (The Public Theater), and *Zorba!* (Encores City Center), among numerous others. Regionally, she has performed at Yale Repertory Theatre, Center Theatre Group, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Long Wharf Theatre, Sundance, Baltimore Center Stage, the Huntington Theatre Company, and the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center. Recent film and television appearances include *St. Vincent*, *Madame Secretary*, and *The Blacklist*. She holds her BA from Yale University and her MFA from the National Theatre Conservatory and is a member of The Actors' Center.

Joél Pérez (Pepe) Joél is an actor and writer who is excited to make his Berkeley Rep debut! As an actor, his theatre work includes *Fun Home* (Broadway and The Public Theater); *Sweet Charity* (The New Group, Lortel Award winner for Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical); *Oedipus El Rey*, *Wild Goose Dreams*, and *As You Like It* (The Public Theater); and *Stuck Elevator* (American Conservatory Theater). His TV work includes *Jesus Christ Superstar* (NBC), *Person of Interest* (CBS), *Odd Mom Out* (Bravo), *The Big C* (Showtime), and *The Outs* (Vimeo). As a writer, his play, *The Church of the Holy Glory*, premiered at Ars Nova ANTfest 2018. His full-length play, *From the Fountain*, is in development with the Sol Project. He is also a writer and performer in *SHIZ*, a monthly musical sketch comedy show at UCB.

He studied at Tufts University, the British American Drama Academy, and Upright Citizen's Brigade. Follow him @misterjoelperez and joelperez.com.

Desiree Rodriguez (Pilar/Ensemble) Desiree is making her Berkeley Rep debut! Off Broadway credits include Elizabeth in *Tricks the Devil Taught Me* (Minetta Lane Theatre). National tours and regional credits include Ana in *Barrio Grrr!* (Kennedy Center), Frida/Rufina/Alfonsina in *Tres Vidas* (Core Ensemble), and Roberta in *Why You Beasting?* (Fringe). TV/film credits include *The Sun Is Also a Star* (Warner Bros.), *The Village* (NBC), *Orange Is the New Black* (Netflix), *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix), *Madam Secretary* (CBS), *Unforgettable* (CBS), and *Black Nativity* (FOX). She has sung backup for Gloria Estefan and Harry Connick Jr. She has recorded with the Yeah Yeah Yeah's on their album *Mosquito*. She is a member of the Broadway Inspirational Voices choir directed by Michael McElroy. You can follow her shenanigans @msdesrod.

Al Rodrigo (Rodrigo/Ensemble) Al is thrilled to be part of *Kiss My Aztec!* familia! New York credits include *Open Admissions* (Broadway U/S); *Blood Wedding*, *Death of Garcia Lorca*, and *Bang Blues* at Joseph Papp Public Theater; *Don Juan of Seville* at Classic Stage Company; *The Señorita from Tacna* and *Savings* at INTAR; and *New York 1937* at Jewish Repertory Theater. Regional credits include *The Happiest Song Plays Last* at the Los Angeles Theatre, *The Marriage of Figaro* at Arizona Theatre Company, *Pericles* at Hartford Stage, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Comedy of Errors* at Syracuse Stage, *Bandido!* at the Mark Taper Forum, and *La Posada Magica* and *Bang Blues* at South Coast Rep. Film credits include *Last Rites*, *The Glass Shield*, *Brown's Requiem*, *The Great White Hype*, *The Birdcage*, *Citizen Jane*, and *House of Sand and Fog*. Al's television credits include *Are You Sleeping*, *Mayans M.C.*, *Supernatural*, *CSI Miami*, *NYPD Blue*, *Burn Notice*, *The West Wing*, *Wanted*, *High Incident*, *Star Trek DS9*, *SeaQuest*, *ARLI\$\$*, *Martin*, *Something Wilder*, *The Nanny*, *Prey*, *Pros and Cons*, *Kojak*, and numerous others. Visit alrodrigo.com.

Richard Henry Ruiz (Pierre Pierrot/Ensemble) Richard is happy to be making his Berkeley Rep debut. Off Broadway he has appeared in *Fiorello* (Encores) and *Two Gentlemen of Verona: The Musical* (The Public Theater). Some regional credits include *Assassins* (Yale Repertory Theatre), *Disney's Hunchback of Notre Dame* (La Jolla Playhouse, Paper Mill Playhouse), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Folger Theatre), *The Music Man* (the Guthrie Theater), *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Old Globe), *Twelfth Night* (Pig Iron Theatre Company), *Man of La Mancha* (Jeff Award nomination, Marriott Lincolnshire Theater), *Guys and Dolls* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *1776* (Connecticut Repertory Theatre), *Oliver* (Goodspeed Opera House), and most recently The D'Ysquith Family in *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* (Florida Studio Theatre). National tours include *Man of La Mancha*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Urinetown*, and *Sweet Charity*. Richard's television credits include *Search Party*, season two. Visit richardhenrynyc.com.

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ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Berkeley Repertory Theatre has grown from a storefront stage to an international leader in innovative theatre. Known for its ambition, relevance, and excellence, as well as its adventurous audience, the nonprofit has provided a welcoming home for emerging and established artists since 1968. Over 5.5 million people have enjoyed nearly 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, which have gone on to win five Tony Awards, seven Obie Awards, nine Drama Desk Awards, one Grammy Award, and many other honors. Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. Its School of Theatre engages and educates some 20,000 people a year and helps build the audiences of tomorrow with its nationally recognized teen programs. Berkeley Rep's bustling facilities – which also include the 400-seat

Peet's Theatre, the 600-seat Roda Theatre, and a spacious campus in West Berkeley – are helping revitalize a renowned city. Be a Rep. Learn more at berkeleyrep.org.

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