

BERKELEY REP

NEWS RELEASE
JOHANNA PFAELZER · ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TOM PARRISH · MANAGING DIRECTOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kevin Kopjak | Prismatic Communications | kevin@prismaticcommunications.com

**BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE ANNOUNCES
FULL CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
*THE THING ABOUT JELLYFISH***

Based on the novel by Ali Benjamin, adapted for the stage by Keith Bunin, and directed by Tyne Rafaeli, *The Thing About Jellyfish* is a coming-of-age tale that explores love, loss, friendship, and the profound expansiveness of the human spirit

Berkeley Rep's Roda Theatre
January 31–March 9, 2025

BERKELEY, CA (December 18, 2024)—Today, **Berkeley Repertory Theatre** announced the full cast and creative team for the world premiere of *The Thing About Jellyfish*, performing at Berkeley Rep's **Roda Theatre** from **Friday, January 31 through Sunday, March 9, 2025**. Press night will be held on Wednesday, February 5, 2025. Single tickets (\$25–\$134) are available online at berkeleyrep.org or by phone at 510-647-2949 (Tue–Sun, 12–7 p.m.). *Ticket prices are subject to change without notice.*

During the final week of summer vacation, 12-year-old Suzy Swanson is devastated to learn that her best friend, Franny, has drowned. Struggling to comprehend this tragic loss, Suzy retreats into her imagination, embarking on journeys around the globe, diving into the ocean's deepest realms, and pondering the enigmas of distant, collapsed stars. Based on the novel by **Ali Benjamin**, adapted for the stage by **Keith Bunin**, *The Thing About Jellyfish* is directed by **Tyne Rafaeli**. This visually stunning and deeply moving coming-of-age story delves into love, loss, friendship, and the boundless resilience of the human spirit and invites audiences on a journey that transcends the boundaries of grief and illuminates the resilience within us all.

The Thing About Jellyfish is presented in association with **Madison Wells Live** and **Emerald Drive**, the production banner of **Teague Theatrical Group**.

“The epic scale of the themes in Ali’s beautiful novel seem to lead quite naturally to the notion of a theatrical adaptation, especially in the company of this particularly gifted creative team,” said Berkeley Rep Artistic Director **Johanna Pfaelzer**. “I’m so proud to continue Berkeley Rep’s longstanding and vibrant tradition of bold world premiere productions with *The Thing About Jellyfish*.”

“Ali Benjamin’s astonishing novel *The Thing About Jellyfish* is a story about the most essential of human experiences—love, loss, and how to embrace the greatest mysteries of the universe,” adds director **Tyne Rafaeli**. “Through the eyes of the singular Suzy Swanson we are taken on a journey that allows us all to reflect on the extraordinary gift of being alive. There is no greater or more important story to be told. Keith Bunin, one of the country’s most talented playwrights, has adapted the book in a way that not only honors what made it a global sensation, but that elevates it to the stage, creating something that can only be experienced live. The material invites visual storytelling rarely seen in plays that takes the audience from the depth of the ocean, to the far reaches of space, and many places in between including the wild and treacherous terrain of middle school. Berkeley Rep’s reputation speaks for itself, and we are so excited to be building on their long history of producing some of the highest level of theatrical work in the country. *The Thing About Jellyfish* has a scale and a sophistication that is a perfect match with Berkeley Rep’s mission. I am so excited to introduce Berkeley’s audiences to this awe-inspiring story, and to work with this incredible company of designers and actors, led by one of the greatest artists I have had the honor to work with—Matilda Lawler.”

“Ali Benjamin’s book *The Thing About Jellyfish* is about a singular 12-year-old girl who’s determined to solve the biggest mysteries of the universe. It’s a thrilling and vibrant story for audiences of all ages, and I’m thrilled to collaborate with the incredible director Tyne Rafaeli to bring it to the stage. Plus, I get to return to the East Bay, where I spent three wonderful years working on the Pixar movie *Onward*,” said playwright **Keith Bunin**. “I’m also very happy to have my first production at Berkeley Rep, and to be reunited with the amazing artistic director Johanna Pfaelzer, who’s been invaluable to my work for more than two decades now.”

“*The Thing About Jellyfish* arrives at a moment when stories of connection, resilience, and understanding are more essential than ever, and on behalf of Madison Wells Live and our producing partners at Emerald Drive, we’re excited to share this magical new production with audiences,” said Madison Wells Live Executive Producer **Jamie Forshaw**. “This play reminds us that even in the face of profound loss, curiosity and imagination can guide us toward healing. With its breathtaking visuals, poignant storytelling, and deeply human themes, it promises an unforgettable theatrical experience that speaks to audiences of all ages.”

The Thing About Jellyfish features **Matilda Lawler** (HBO’s “Station Eleven” and “The Gilded Age,” *The Ferryman* on Broadway) in the role of Suzy. She is joined by **Jasper Bermudez, Cassidy Brown, Christiana Clark, Sydney Walker Freeman, Andy Grotelueschen, Maxwell Hamilton, Stephanie Janssen, Colby Kipnes, Lexi Perkel, Rebecca Schweitzer, Robert Stanton, Kayla Teruel, and Antonio Watson** (*listed alphabetically*).

Based on the novel by **Ali Benjamin**, adapted for the stage by **Keith Bunin**, the creative team for *The Thing About Jellyfish* includes Directed by **Tyne Rafaeli**, **Yasmine Lee** (Movement Director/Choreographer), **Derek McLane** (Scenic Design), **Linda Cho** (Costume Design), **Lap Chi Chu** (Lighting Design), **Dan Kluger** (Sound Design), **Lucy Mackinnon** (Projection Design), **Jamie Harrison** (Special Effects), **Rachel Zucker** (Stage Manager), and **Chris Steckel** (Assistant Stage Manager).

Berkeley Rep recognizes the generous support of **BART** and **Peet's Coffee**, its official season sponsors. Berkeley Rep is also delighted to acknowledge support at the season sponsor level from **Stephen & Susan Chamberlin**, **Yogen & Peggy Dalal**, **Bruce Golden & Michelle Mercer**, **Frances Hellman & Warren Breslau**, **Wayne Jordan & Quinn Delaney**, **Jonathan Logan & John Plane**, **Gisele & Kenneth F. Miller**, **Jack & Betty Schafer**, **the Strauch Kulhanjian Family**, **Kelli & Steffan Tomlinson**, and **Gail & Arne Wagner**.

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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 6 million people have enjoyed more than 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 86 world premieres. Berkeley Rep shows have gone on to win eight Tony Awards, nine Obie Awards, 11 Drama Desk Awards, a Grammy Award, a Pulitzer Prize, and many other honors. In recognition of its place on the national stage, Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. Through its annual seven-play season, together with up to four special event presentations, Berkeley Rep invites audiences to enjoy an eclectic range of theatrical experiences featuring diverse artistic voices, themes, and perspectives. To formalize, enhance, and expand the processes by which Berkeley Rep makes theatre, The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work was launched in 2012. Serving some 20,000 people a year, Berkeley Rep's School of Theatre ensures broad access to dynamic arts educational activities, especially for Bay Area youth, and provides immersive training for current and future theatre makers. In 2021, Berkeley Rep launched In Dialogue, a program that places its theatre-making skills and resources in service of the community. Using storytelling as an anchor, In Dialogue is developing long-term collaborations with local, socially centered organizations, as well as educating and activating our audiences around organizations whose work aligns with the themes of our productions. Berkeley Rep's bustling facilities—which include the 600-seat Roda Theatre, 400-seat Peet's Theatre, Medak Center, and a spacious campus in West Berkeley—are helping revitalize a renowned city. Learn more at berkeleyrep.org.

ABOUT MADISON WELLS LIVE

The live entertainment arm of Madison Wells, Gigi Pritzker's award-winning, independent production company who believes in telling stories by, and about, badass women, as well as people who love pushing boundaries. Led by Executive Producer Jamie Forshaw, Madison Wells Live focuses on producing purpose-driven projects through collaboration with partners who are aligned in the belief

that great storytelling can provoke, inspire, and move audiences around the world. Broadway: *Swept Away*, *Water for Elephants*, *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, *Shucked*, *Company* (Tony Award for Best Revival), *The Old Man and The Pool*, *Pass Over*, *Hadestown* (Tony Award for Best Musical), *The Inheritance* (Tony Award for Best Play), and *Million Dollar Quartet*. West End: *Kathy & Stella Solve a Murder!*, *The Motive and the Cue* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. Off-Broadway: *Mindplay*, *We Live in Cairo*, and *Seven Deadly Sins*. For more information about Madison Wells Live, visit www.madisonwellsmedia.com

ABOUT EMERALD DRIVE

The production banner of *Teague Theatrical Group (TTG)*, an award-winning company founded by Townsend Teague and Liesl Lar, who believe great stories make the world a better place. An emerging powerhouse in the entertainment space, the company produces original works and invests in theater, media, and entertainment ventures. Broadway credits include *Appropriate* (Tony Award for Best Revival Play), *Stereophonic* (Tony Award for Best Play), and the forthcoming *Real Women Have Curves* (Broadway 2025) and *Kissing in Manhattan*. West End: *Stereophonic* (2025). Australia: *MJ the Musical* (2025). Film: *Yes or Yes*. Television: *The Boy Who Wanted to Rock* (in development). Townsend and Liesl view theater and other narrative art forms as bridges to connect people by amplifying the core of what binds us: empathy, understanding, and shared experiences. TTG is dedicated to fostering collaboration, support, and empowerment of artists and entertainment industry entrepreneurs, including underrepresented voices. For more information, visit: www.teaguetheatrical.com