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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE'S ARTISTIC DIRECTOR JOHANNA PFAELZER ANNOUNCES  
NEW COMMISSIONS FOR 2021****Commissions granted to Rafael Casal, Daveed Diggs, Dipika Guha, Sarah Ruhl, and Jack Thorne  
and Nico Muhly**

June 17, 2021 - Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer today announced her first set of commissions since joining the company in 2019. This dynamic group of artists' previous works encompass a wide range of genres, forms, and subject matter. The commissioned artists will be supported from inception to world premiere productions at Berkeley Rep over the next few seasons.

"I am so proud and grateful to be able to make commitments to this group of artists in this particular moment," says Pfaelzer. "Very early on in the pandemic, our Managing Director Susie Medak and I talked about these commissions as a commitment to our artistic community that Berkeley Rep would weather this storm, and a promise to ourselves and our audiences that there would be rich, complicated, beautifully theatrical stories to explore together on the other side. Sarah, Dipika, Rafael, Daveed, Nico, and Jack are each such extraordinary storytellers — the ability to support them in crafting new narratives, and anticipating the moment that we can gather together in a theatre in the presence of their imaginations is a source of inspiration for me in these profoundly challenging times."

Several of playwrights chosen have a strong connection to Berkeley Rep, including the writers/producers and stars of *Blindspotting*, Tony Award winner Daveed Diggs and writer/actor Rafael Casal, both of whom are from the Bay Area and participated in teen programs at The Theatre. Diggs worked with Pfaelzer in her previous position as artistic director at New York Stage and Film. "We both grew up seeing countless productions at the Rep," says Diggs and Casal. "It has been vital to our development as Bay Area storytellers and artists. We couldn't be more excited to collaborate with the Berkeley Rep team to bring an original work to their iconic stage. Stay tuned."

Also featured among the group are Tony Award nominee Sarah Ruhl, whose plays have appeared six times on Berkeley Rep stages, most recently the world premiere *Becky Nurse of Salem*, and Dipika Guha (*Yoga Play*), a participant in Berkeley Rep's Ground Floor Summer Residency Lab. Rounding out the esteemed company of artists are theatre veterans Jack Thorne and Nico Muhly. Their collaboration ***Set This House in Order*** will be a musical adaptation of the 2003 novel by Matt Ruff, directed by John Tiffany with choreography by Steven Hoggett (who first worked with Pfaelzer during the development of *American Idiot* at New York Stage and Film prior to its acclaimed production at Berkeley Rep). Thorne,

Tiffany, and Hoggett are the team behind the international hit *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. “Five years ago Nico Muhly sent a copy of ***Set This House in Order*** to both Steven Hoggett and I, shortly after we all collaborated on *The Glass Menagerie* at the American Repertory Theater,” says Tiffany. “Steven and I had the exact same response: this is an incredible story which is crying out to be shared with a theatre audience — and Jack Thorne has to adapt it — and we have to create it with Johanna at Berkeley Rep.”

## **ARTIST BIOS**

### **Rafael Casal**

Rafael Casal is a critically acclaimed writer, producer, actor, and poet. He made his feature debut in *Blindspotting*, which he wrote, produced, and starred. The celebrated film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, and Lionsgate won a major bidding war. Casal is currently in production as the showrunner for the series adaptation for Starz. He acted opposite Hugh Jackman in the Emmy-winning HBO film *Bad Education* and Ethan Hawke in Showtime’s *The Good Lord Bird*. He wrote music for the Apple series *Central Park* and is writing and composing for season 2. Casal is also well-known to audiences for his work on HBO’s Def Poetry. His digital content and music albums have garnered millions of views and listens. His theatre-in-verse works have been presented at venues across the country, and his music has been featured on MTV and Showtime series as well as at SXSW and Sundance. Casal is the co-founder and the artistic director of the landmark Bars Workshop at the famed New York City’s Public Theater. He founded and served as the creative director for the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s First Wave Undergraduate Arts Program and Scholarship, which was their first Four-Year Contemporary Performing Arts Program.

### **Daveed Diggs**

Tony and Grammy Award-winning actor, rapper, and producer Daveed Diggs is widely known for originating the dual roles of Thomas Jefferson and Marquis de Lafayette in the Broadway sensation *Hamilton*. Diggs can be seen starring in Pixar’s *Soul* on Disney+ as well as Season 2 of his hit TNT series *Snowpiercer*, which premiered on January 25, 2021. The first season premiered in May 2020 as the #1 new cable entertainment program of 2020. This past fall, Diggs starred in Showtime’s limited series *The Good Lord Bird* opposite Ethan Hawke. This past summer, Diggs starred in Disney+’s *Hamilton*, which was released on July 3, 2020. He also lent his voice to Apple TV+’s new animated musical sitcom, *Central Park*, where he starred opposite Kristen Bell, Josh Gad, Stanley Tucci, Leslie Odom Jr., and Kathryn Hahn. In 2018, Diggs co-wrote, produced, and starred in the critically acclaimed Lionsgate feature, *Blindspotting*. Following the film’s success, Starz ordered a television series spinoff starring Jasmine Cephas Jones. Diggs will serve as co-executive producer and writer of the series. Diggs is a member of the West Coast-based experimental hip-hop trio “clipping,” which released its fifth album entitled *Visions of Bodies Being Burned* on October 23, 2020.

### **Dipika Guha**

Dipika Guha is a Calcutta-born playwright raised in India, Russia, and the United Kingdom. Her plays include *Yoga Play* (South Coast Rep, SF Playhouse, and Syracuse Stage, amongst others), *The Art of Gaman* (Theatre 503 London, Relentless Award semifinalist), and *Unreliable* (Kansas City Rep). Recent works includes *Azaan*, a play for Oregon Symphony Orchestra; *In Braunau* for Playwrights Horizons Theatre School; and contributions to *You Across From Me* (Humana, Actors Theatre of Louisville). Guha was a Hodder Fellow at the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University, the inaugural Shakespeare’s Sister Playwriting Fellow, and is a current Venturous Fellow with the Lark for her play *Passing*. She’s a proud alumnus of Ars Nova Playgroup, Soho Rep’s Writer/Director Lab, the Women’s Project Time Warner Lab, Dramatists Guild Fellows Program, the Ma Yi Writers Lab, the Geffen Playwrights Lab, and is a member of New Dramatists and a Core Writer at the Playwrights Centre. She is currently under commission from South Coast Rep, Manhattan Theatre Club, and Barrington Stage. For television, Guha has written on *American Gods*, *Sneaky Pete*, *Overlooked*, projects in development at

AMC, and the comedy *Black Monday* on Showtime. She is also developing a pilot with FilmNation. Guha earned her undergraduate degree at University College London, won a Frank Knox Fellowship to Harvard University, and has an MFA from the Yale School of Drama under Paula Vogel.

### **Nico Muhly**

Nico Muhly (b.1981) is an American composer. The recipient of commissions from the Philharmonie de Paris, Carnegie Hall, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Tallis Scholars, he has written more than 100 works, including the operas *Two Boys* (2011) and *Marnie* (2017), both premiered at English National Opera and staged at the Metropolitan Opera, which commissioned the works. Muhly is a frequent collaborator with choreographer Benjamin Millepied and released an album co-composed with Sufjan Stevens and Bryce Dessner (*Planetarium*, 2017). As an arranger, he has worked with Jónsi, James Blake, Joanna Newsom, and Yoko Ono. Work for stage and screen include music for John Tiffany's Broadway revival of *The Glass Menagerie* and for films including the Academy Award-winning *The Reader*. Born in Vermont, Muhly studied composition at the Juilliard School before working for Philip Glass. He is part of the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, which released his albums *Speaks Volumes* (2006) and *Mothertongue* (2008). He lives in New York City.

### **Sarah Ruhl**

Sarah Ruhl's plays include *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*; *The Clean House*; *Passion Play*; *Dead Man's Cell Phone*; *Melancholy Play*; *For Peter Pan on her 70th Birthday*; *The Oldest Boy*; *Stage Kiss*; *Dear Elizabeth*; *Eurydice*; *Orlando*; *Late: a cowboy song*; and a translation of *Three Sisters*. She has been a two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist and a Tony Award nominee. Her plays have been produced on and off Broadway, around the country, and internationally where they have been translated into over 15 languages. Originally from Chicago, Ruhl received her MFA from Brown University where she studied with Paula Vogel. She has received the Steinberg Award, the Sam French Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the Whiting Award, the Lily Award, a Pen Award for mid-career playwrights, and the MacArthur Award. You can read more about her work on [SarahRuhlplaywright.com](http://SarahRuhlplaywright.com). Her new book *100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write* was a *New York Times* notable book of the year, and she most recently published *Letters from Max* with Max Ritvo. She teaches at the Yale School of Drama, and she lives in Brooklyn with her family.

### **Jack Thorne**

Jack Thorne's theatre credits include *A Christmas Carol* (Old Vic/Broadway), *Sunday* (Atlantic Theatre), *The End of History* (The Royal Court), *King Kong* (Broadway), *Woyzeck* (The Old Vic), *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (West End/Broadway), *Mydidae* (Soho/West End), *Stacy* (Tron/Arcola/West End), *Let the Right One In* (West End/Dundee Rep/Royal Court), *Junkyard* (UK tour), *The Solid Life of Sugarwater* (Graeae/National Theatre/UK tour), *Hope* (Royal Court), *Bunny* (Nabokov/UK tour/New York), and *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (Sheffield Crucible/UK tour). Television includes *The Eddy*, *The Accident*, *His Dark Materials*, Philip K. Dick's *Electric Dreams*, *Kiri*, *National Treasure*, *The Last Panthers*, *Don't Take My Baby*, *This Is England*, *The Fades*, *Glue*, and *Cast-Offs*. Film includes *The Secret Garden*, *Enola Holmes*, *Radioactive*, *The Aeronauts*, *Dirt Music*, *Radioactive*, *Wonder*, *War Book*, *A Long Way Down*, and *The Scouting Book for Boys*. Jack's work for television has won him five BAFTAs and an RTS Television Award. Jack is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

### **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 six Tony Awards, seven Obie Awards, nine Drama Desk Awards, one Grammy Award, one Pulitzer Prize, and many other honors. Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. 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. The Berkeley Rep 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.

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