

**PRESS CONTACT**

Voleine Amilcar, Director of Public Relations  
(510) 647-2917, [vamilcar@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:vamilcar@berkeleyrep.org)

**For downloadable images visit:**

<http://www.berkeleyrep.org/press/presskit-1415pp.asp>

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****BERKELEY REP PRESENTS UNIVERSES' PARTY PEOPLE****Multimedia performance rocks and unlocks legacy of the Black Panthers and Young Lords**

**September 24, 2014** – [Berkeley Repertory Theatre](http://www.berkeleyrep.org) proudly announces the Bay Area premiere of [\*Party People\*](#), a high-wattage fusion of story and song about the legacy of the Black Panthers and Young Lords. In the 1960s these revolutionaries fought injustice, provided free food and medical care for their communities – and struggled against a government determined to suppress them. Written by **UNIVERSES** (Steven Sapp, Mildred Ruiz-Sapp, and William Ruiz, aka Ninja) and based on dozens of interviews, *Party People* imagines the Black Panthers and Young Lords reuniting today at an art opening curated by a couple of young counterculturists, where old wounds open and generations collide. Helmed by Liesl Tommy, associate director at Berkeley Rep, and developed in [The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work](#), *Party People* asks, what is the price of being a revolutionary, and what happens to those who come after? Get ready for a hyperkinetic mix of live video, hip hop, jazz, rock, gospel, blues, Latin rhythms, and spoken word as the explosive theatre ensemble UNIVERSES rocks and unlocks the radical and complicated legacy of the Black Panthers and Young Lords. *Party People* begins previews **Friday, October 17, opens on Friday, October 24, and runs through Sunday, November 16. Press night for *Party People* will be held on Friday, October 24, 2014.** Individual tickets start at \$29 and can be purchased by phone at (510) 647-2949 or online at [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org).

"*Party People* is a boldly crafted ensemble piece, which originally premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. After an enlivening run in Ashland, we're developing a new version of the show for Berkeley Rep," says **Tony Taccone**, Berkeley Rep's Michael Leibert Artistic Director. "Written and performed by acclaimed theatre trio known as UNIVERSES, the play is an attempt to re-examine and reclaim the Panther's and Young Lord's rightful place in history. I can't think of a more perfect play for Berkeley Rep and the Bay Area."

"*Party People* is a meticulously researched and passionately written musical production infused with raw energy and emotional catharsis," remarks **Tommy**. "The play presents the collective memories of veterans of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords and the complicated legacy they left behind. It's one of the more thrilling projects that I've worked on because the subject matter is extremely relevant and also very personally resonant. We are so proud and honored to bring this remarkable story to Berkeley Rep's stage."

**Steven Sapp**, co-founder of UNIVERSES adds, "We are direct recipients of the programs that were established by the Black Panthers and Young Lords. For us it's more than just a moment in history — it's part of our lives, of how we grew up, and how our communities grew up. It's natural for us to want to tell their story and to show that these movements were major moments in American history. It's a thrill for us to bring this story so close to the birthplace of the Black Panthers."

(MORE)

---

**RECIPIENT OF THE TONY AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING REGIONAL THEATRE**

**Party People's** 2012 world premiere at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) was met with an enthusiastic reception from critics and audiences alike. **KLCC Radio Eugene** writes "'Party People' is an artful mixture of spoken poetry, hip-hop theatre, blues, jazz, gospel and rap. Mesmerizing monologues punctuate this well-balanced theatrical potpourri." **Ashland Daily Tidings** adds, "high-energy, vibrant, roller coaster ride — via dialogue, monologue, poetry, music and dance — of the rise and fall of the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords..."

**UNIVERSES (Steven Sapp, Mildred Ruiz-Sapp, and William Ruiz, aka Ninja)** is an international ensemble of multi-disciplined writers and performers who fuse poetry, theatre, jazz, hip-hop, politics, down-home blues, and Spanish boleros to create moving, challenging, and entertaining theatrical works. Of UNIVERSES critically lauded performances, **The Village Voice raves**, "An effervescent, racially mixed group who call themselves Universes...are as likely to kick some poetry as break out into a capella singing, to orchestrate a vocal exercise as they are to burst into a step show....Their energy and realness is unmatched." **Variety adds**, "The group's musical sophistication is especially surprising. Blasting through the fractured syntax of New York urban culture, the quintet exhibits the melodic veracity of a seasoned doo-wop group and the contrapuntal percussion of an adroit rhythm section."

**Liesl Tommy (Director)** is Berkeley Rep's associate director and helmed the acclaimed production of *Ruined*. She is an award-winning international theatre director known for her world premieres of visceral, politically complex new plays and her fresh, highly theatrical revivals of classics. She directed the world premieres of *Appropriate* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Signature Theatre Company), *Party People* by UNIVERSES (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *The White Man – A Complex Declaration of Love* by Joan Rang (DanskDansk Theatre, Denmark), *Peggy Picket Sees the Face of God* by Roland Schimmelpfennig (Luminato Festival/Canadian Stage Toronto), *Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira (Yale Repertory Theatre, Woolly Mammoth), *The Good Negro* by Tracey Scott Wilson (the Public Theater, Dallas Theater Center), *A History of Light* by Eisa Davis (Contemporary American Theatre Festival), *Angela's Mixtape* by Eisa Davis (Synchronicity Performance Group, New Georges), *Bus* and *Family Ties* (Play Company for the Romania Kiss Me! Festival). Her other credits include groundbreaking and award-winning re-interpretations of *Les Misérables*, *Hamlet*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, as well as a four-city tour of *Ruined*. She has worked at California Shakespeare Theater, the Huntington Theatre Company, Center Stage in Baltimore, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, and Sundance East Africa on Manda Island in Kenya, among others. Tommy's upcoming work includes two new musicals: *Kid Victory* by Greg Pierce and John Kander at Signature/Vineyard Theatre, and *Melancholy Play* by Sarah Ruhl and Todd Almond at Trinity Repertory Company. She also has three new musicals in development. She serves as a program associate at Sundance Institute Theatre Program and as an artist trustee with the Sundance Institute's Board of Trustees. Tommy facilitated the inaugural Sundance East Africa Theatre Director's Lab in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Tommy has earned an Obie Award, a Lillian Hellman Award, and the Alan Schneider Award for directing, the inaugural Susan Stroman Directing Award from the Vineyard Theatre, the NEA/TCG Directors Grant, and the New York Theatre Workshop Casting/Directing Fellowship. Almost every production she has directed has been nominated and won numerous awards for directing, production, best new play, design, choreography, or acting. She has taught or guest directed at Yale Repertory Theatre, Juilliard, NYU, and Brown University. Tommy is an alum of Trinity Rep Conservatory and a native of Cape Town, South Africa.

(MORE)

**Party People features explosive performances by a group of talented musicians, vocalists, and dancers, including:**

- **J. Bernard Calloway (Blue)** is making his Berkeley Rep debut. On Broadway he played Delray in the 2010 Tony Award-winning Best Musical *Memphis* at the Shubert Theatre. He also portrayed the civil rights activist Ralph Abernathy in the 2014 Tony Award-winning Best Play *All The Way* at the Neil Simon Theatre. Off-Broadway, Calloway was an original cast member of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated hit *The Good Negro*, directed by Liesl Tommy at the Public Theater.
- **Michael Elich (Marcus/FBI Agent)** is pleased to be reuniting with UNIVERSES as an original cast member of *Party People*. He recently premiered the role of Gregor in Amy Freed's *The Monster-Builder* at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland and portrayed Mark Rothko in *Red* at the Clarence Brown Theatre in Tennessee. In 20 seasons with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Elich has played in 47 productions, including *The Pirates of Penzance*, *King John*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Music Man*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Idiot's Delight*, *Troilus And Cressida*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *Coriolanus*, *Awake and Sing!*, and premiered the role of Don D'Avanzo in *Continental Divide*, directed by Tony Taccone, a co-production with Berkeley Rep which transferred to London.
- **Christopher Livingston (Malik)** last appeared at Berkeley Rep in Mary Zimmerman's *The White Snake*. His off-Broadway credits include *The Urban Retreat* at the Public Theatre (studio series) and *The Architecture of Becoming* at Women's Project. He's also been seen in *The Whipping Man* at Portland Center Stage; *The White Snake*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Part 1*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *Party People* at Oregon Shakespeare Festival and more.
- **Amy Lizardo (Clara)** is an actress and singer based in the Bay Area. She was most recently seen in *Taming of the Shrew* as Tranio with San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, *Hundred Days* as Sarah with Z Space, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* as Yitzhak with Boxcar Theatre, and *The Wiz* at Berkeley Playhouse.
- **Jesse J. Perez (Tito)** has been seen at Berkeley Rep in *The Arabian Nights* and *Argonautika*, both directed by Mary Zimmerman, as well as last season's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*. His New York credits include *Triple Happiness* at Second Stage Theatre, *Barrio Grrrl* at Summer Play Festival (directed by Liesl Tommy), *Recent Tragic Events* at Playwrights Horizons, *In the Penal Colony* at Classic Stage Company, *Up Against the Wind* at New York Theatre Workshop, and *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Metropolitan Opera.
- **Sophia Ramos (Maruca)** has sung with an impressive list of studio and stage collaborators, including Jason Newsted of Metallica, Paul Simon, Joey Ramone, Shakira, and Psychotica, with whom she appeared on the mainstage of the Lollapalooza tour with Soundgarden and Rage Against the Machine. She has sung behind such artists as Rod Stewart, Mary J. Blige, and Lionel Richie on *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon*, and *Good Morning America*. She starred as Janis Joplin in *Love, Janis* for the Arizona Theater Company and was proud to best the first Latina cast in the role. Ramos also starred in the world premiere of Robert Schenkkan and Neil Berg's rock musical *The 12* at the New Victory Theater in New York.
- **Robynn Rodriguez (Donna/Fina)** is always thrilled to be back at Berkeley Rep, where she was last seen in Tony Kushner's *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures* and the world premiere of *Ghost Light*, created and developed by Tony Taccone and Jonathan Moscone. She was also in Berkeley Rep's production of *The Oresteia* and the world premiere of David Edgar's *Continental Divide* (a co-production with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival), which toured to La Jolla Playhouse, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and the Barbican in London.

(MORE)

For 22 seasons, Rodriguez was a member of the resident acting company at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where she appeared in over 40 productions. Her work has been seen at the Guthrie Theater, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the Shakespeare Theatre Company, among others.

- **Mildred Ruiz-Sapp (Helita)** is a co-founder and core member of UNIVERSES. Her playwriting/acting credits include *Ameriville* and *Blue Suite* (directed and developed by Chay Yew), *The Denver Project* (directed by Dee Covington), *One Shot in Lotus Position* (directed by Bonnie Metzger), *Rhythmicity* and *The Ride* (directed by Steven Sapp), and *Slanguage* (directed and developed by Jo Bonney). She has also performed in *The Comedy of Errors* (directed by Kent Gash), *The Unfortunates* (directed by Shana Cooper), and Alfred Jarry's *Ubu: Enchained* (directed by Steven Sapp). Ruiz-Sapp was a 2008 Ambassador of Culture for the U.S. State Department and participated in Rhythm Road Tour with Jazz at Lincoln Center. She is the recipient of the 2008 TCG Peter Zeisler Award, the 2006 Career Advancement Fellowship from the Ford Foundation through Pregones Theater, the TCG National Theater Artist Residency Program Award, and the BRIO Award (Bronx Recognizes Its Own). She is a co-founder of the Point CDC and a board member at the National Performance Network. Her publication credits include *UNIVERSES — The Big Bang* (2015, TCG Books), *Slanguage in the Fire This Time* (TCG Books), and *Party People* in *The Manifesto Anthology* (Rain City Projects).
- **William Ruiz's (Jimmy)** playwriting/acting credits include *Ameriville* (directed and developed by Chay Yew) and *Waiting for Gordo* (adapted from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*). He also performed in *Slanguage* (directed and developed by Jo Bonney), Jack Kerouac's *Ti-Jean Blues* (adapted and directed by JoAnne Akalaitis), Nicole Quinn's *Tree Tails* (directed by Shelly Wyant), Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (directed by Nick Jones), Anthony Rivera's *Latin Howel* (directed by Todd A. Jackson), Nicky Cruz's *Run Baby Run* (directed by Chris Fredricks). Ruiz was a 2008 Ambassador of Culture for the U.S. State Department and participated in Rhythm Road Tour with Jazz at Lincoln Center. He is the founder/artistic director of BARDOS Theater Co. (based out of Puerto Rico) and a member of the Network of Ensemble. His publication credits include *UNIVERSES — The Big Bang* (2015, TCG Books) and *Party People* in *The Manifesto Anthology* (Rain City Projects).
- **Steven Sapp (Omar)** is a co-founder and core member of UNIVERSES. His playwriting/Acting credits include *Ameriville* and *Blue Suite* (directed and developed by Chay Yew), *The Denver Project* (directed by Dee Covington), *One Shot in Lotus Position* (directed by Bonnie Metzger), and *Slanguage* (directed and developed by Jo Bonney). He directed and performed in *Rhythmicity*, and wrote, directed, and performed in *The Ride*. He also acted in *The Comedy of Errors* (directed by Kent Gash) and directed Will Powers' *The Seven* at the University of Iowa. He was a 2008 Ambassador of Culture for the U.S. State Department and participated in Rhythm Road Tour with Jazz at Lincoln Center. Sapp is the recipient of the 2008 TCG Peter Zeisler Award, the 2002 TCG National Directors Award, the TCG National Theater Artist Residency Program Award, the 1998 and 2002 BRIO Awards (Bronx Recognizes Its Own), and a Van Lier Fellowship with New Dramatists. He is a co-founder of the Point CDC. His publication credits include *UNIVERSES — The Big Bang* (2015, TCG Books), *Slanguage in the Fire This Time* (TCG Books), and *Party People* in *The Manifesto Anthology* (Rain City Projects).
- **Reggie D. White (Solias)** is thrilled to be making his Berkeley Rep debut with *Party People*. He was previously seen in the world premiere of the musical *Hundred Days* at Z Space and has performed around the San Francisco Bay Area at San Jose Repertory Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, TheatreWorks, Crowded Fire Theater, Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, Intersection for the Arts, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and others.

(MORE)

- **C. Kelly Wright (Amira)** is making her Berkeley Rep debut. A Bay Area veteran, she last appeared as The Lady in *The Scottsboro Boys* at American Conservatory Theater, earning her a 2012 Bay Area Theatre Critics Award for Best Featured Female in a Musical. Off Broadway, she starred in Negro Ensemble Company's revival of *The Great MacDaddy*, and her performance as Madam in *Langston in Harlem* at Urban Stages earned an AUDELCO Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress. Regionally, Wright earned a Barrymore Best Actress nomination for Pearl Johnson in *Black Pearl Sings!* at InterAct Theatre Company, Philadelphia.

The creative team includes **Marcus Doshi** (scenic and lighting designer), **Meg Neville** (costume designer), **Broken Chord** (sound design, vocal direction, and original compositions), **Alexander V. Nichols** (projection designer), and **Millicent Johnnie** (choreographer). The stage manager for *Party People* is Kimberly Mark Webb.

The 2014-15 season is supported by BART and Wells Fargo, who have generously renewed their commitment as Berkeley Rep's official season sponsors. Berkeley Rep is also proud to have KPIX-TV (Channel 5) as a first-year season sponsor. *Party People* is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Strauch Kulhanjian Family and Jack and Betty Schafer. The executive sponsors for the show are Frances Hellman and Warren Breslau, and Gail and Arne Wagner.

Berkeley Rep's production of *Party People* gave us a unique opportunity to partner with various organizations in the East Bay – including the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA), which, as the only museum dedicated to California art, history, and natural science, houses artifacts, art, and material culture about the Black Panther Party. OMCA will curate and install striking historical images in the Thrust Stage's lobby and on the Theatre's doors that help tell the story of both the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords.

In the fall of 2016, OMCA will present a major exhibition to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Black Panther Party's founding on October 15, 1966 in Oakland. This project will present a contemporary view of the Black Panther Party's legacy from multiple perspectives and show how the Party continues to inspire grassroots social justice and community empowerment efforts locally, nationally, and internationally. The project will in part consider the relevance of certain aspects of the Ten Point Platform today. This exhibition will include gallery displays of art, artifacts, and material culture in addition to off-site artist-driven community engagement projects in various locations in the East Bay.

#### **ABOUT BERKELEY REP**

Berkeley Repertory Theatre has grown from a storefront stage to an international 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. In four decades, four million people have enjoyed nearly 400 shows at Berkeley Rep. These shows have gone on to win five Tony Awards, seven Obie Awards, nine Drama Desk Awards, one Grammy Award, 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. Its bustling facilities – which include the 400-seat Thrust Stage, the 600-seat Roda Theatre, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, the Osher Studio, and a spacious new campus in West Berkeley – are helping revitalize a renowned city. Learn more at [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org).

###

**FACT SHEET**

**Party People**

**WHO:** Written by & starring UNIVERSES (Steven Sapp, Mildred Ruiz-Sapp, and William Ruiz, aka Ninja)

Developed and directed by Liesl Tommy

Choreography by Millicent Johnnie

Featuring: J. Bernard Calloway (Blue), Michael Elich (Marcus/FBI Agent), Christopher Livingston (Malik), Amy Lizardo (Clara), Jesse J. Perez (Tito), Sophia Ramos (Maruca), Robynn Rodriguez (Donna/Fina), Mildred Ruiz-Sapp, (Helita), William Ruiz (Jimmy), Steven Sapp, (Omar), Reggie D. White (Solias), and C. Kelly Wright (Amira).

Creative team: Marcus Doshi (scenic and lighting designer), Meg Neville (costume designer), Broken Chord (sound design, vocal direction, and original compositions), and Alexander V. Nichols (projection designer).

**WHAT:** Get ready for a hyperkinetic mix of live video, hip hop, jazz, rock, gospel, blues, Latin rhythms, and spoken word as the explosive theatre ensemble UNIVERSES rocks and unlocks the radical and complicated legacy of the Black Panthers and Young Lords in this high-wattage fusion of story and song.

**WHERE:** Berkeley Repertory Theatre  
Thrust Stage, 2025 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Berkeley, CA 94704

**WHEN: 35 PERFORMANCES: Friday, October 17 – Sunday, November 16, 2014**

- Tuesdays and Fridays @ 8:00 PM
- Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM
- Thursdays @ 8:00 PM
- Saturdays @ 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM; no matinee on 10/18
- Sundays @ 2:00 PM and 7:00 PM; no matinee on 10/19

**Special Events:**

Low-cost previews: Friday 10/17, Saturday 10/18, Tuesday 10/21, and Thursday 10/23 @ 8:00 PM; Sunday 10/19 and Wednesday 10/22 @ 7:00 PM

Opening Night: Friday 10/24 @ 8:00 PM; includes a pre-show dinner for donors sponsored by Autumn Press, C.G. Di Arie Vineyard and Winery, Hafner Vineyard, and Hotel Shattuck Plaza

Teen Night: Friday 10/17 @ 6:30 PM

FREE docent events: docent talks before Tuesday and Thursday evening performances and discussions after all matinees

Post-play discussions: Thursday 10/31, Tuesday 11/4, and Thursday 11/13 following the performance. In addition UNIVERSES will be hosting talkbacks in the bar after evening performances on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

Last Call: Saturday 10/18 following the evening performance

Open Captioned Performance: Sunday, 11/16 @ 2:00 PM

**HOW MUCH: \$29 - \$89** (subject to change) **TIX & INFO:** (510) 647-2949 – [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org)

Discounts: Half-price tickets available for anyone under 30 years of age; \$10 discount for students and seniors one hour before curtain; groups of 10 or more, contact (510) 647-2918 or [groups@berkeleyrep.org](mailto:groups@berkeleyrep.org)

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					17 OCT	18
					8 8 8	8 8 8
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
7 8		8 8 8	7 8	8 8 8	8 8	2 8 / 8
26	27	28	29	30	31	1 NOV
2 8 / 7		8 8	7	8 8	8 8	2 8 / 8
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2 8 / 7		8 8 8	7	8 8	8	2 8 / 8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
2 8 / 7		8 8	7	8 8 8	8	2 8 / 8
16						
2 8 / 7						

8 OPENING 8 PREVIEW 8 TEEN NIGHT 8 DOCENT EVENT  
8 LAST CALL 8 POST-SHOW DISCUSSION 8 OPEN CAPTIONING