

BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE

2020/21 SEASON REPORT

Berkeley Rep's 2020/21 season was a year unlike any other in the Theatre's more than 50 year history. The COVID-19 pandemic has tested Berkeley Rep in ways we never imagined. Continued impacts from the pandemic prompted Berkeley Rep to reschedule all seven subscription shows slated for the 2021 season to 2021/22, and the Theatre shifted to all online artistic programming through 2020/21. We used this period while the pandemic shuttered our venues to experiment with new ways of working, connecting with audiences, and collaborating with colleagues in the field. We found creative ways to deliver vibrant stories and high quality arts education content to a community that was hungry for it.

Though we knew without in-person programming we were unlikely to reach our usual annual audience of 200,000 patrons and 20,000 students, we are proud that free and low-cost Berkeley Rep-produced Rep On-Air content garnered over 60,000 view/listens (plus additional participation in online artist conversations and auxiliary show-related events and activities), close to 3,000 participants engaged with our School of Theatre programming, and we served nearly 100 artists through commissions, a hybrid Summer Residency Lab, and opportunities for employment.

2020/21 REP ON-AIR

In 2020/21, Berkeley Rep offered audiences a suite of online arts experiences dubbed Rep On-Air that included a combination of on-demand original audio and video works produced in-house by Berkeley Rep, What's in a Play?, a book group for plays offered via Zoom, as well as streamed video performances from some of the Theatre's longtime collaborators. Our goals with these programs were to provide audiences with opportunities to engage with art from home and bridge the isolation of sheltering in place, and to supplement income for artists, the vast majority of whom lost some if not all of their income during the pandemic.

In fall 2020, we were thrilled to produce a new audio version of Tony Taccone and Bennett S. Cohen's adaptation of the Sinclair Lewis novel *It Can't Happen Here*, which appeared as a stage production in our 2016/17 season. *It Can't Happen Here* was the first virtual show Berkeley Rep developed in-house after the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order went into effect in March 2020. Released to coincide with the 2020 presidential election, the free-to-stream radio play was both an opportunity to bring an important story to audiences and a means to encourage dialogue and motivate citizens to exercise their civic duty and vote. We joined with over 100 broadcast partners across the United States — including theatres, universities, community groups, and more — to share our production with their constituencies and our study guide with students. To launch the production, Berkeley Rep hosted a live virtual conversation with creators Tony Taccone and Bennett S. Cohen and director Lisa Peterson to give listeners the creative team's perspective on the story's relevance and insight into creating art in the pandemic. All told, over 32,000 people tuned in to listen to the production.



The virtual launch event for *It Can't Happen Here*.

In the fall, Rep On-Air also featured the presentation of streamed performances from three Berkeley Rep favorites: director Emma Rice shared her sweet and whimsical *Romantics Anonymous*, solo performer Hershey Felder brought us *Gershwin Alone* and *A Paris Love Story* featuring the music of Claude Debussy, and for the holidays, director Mary Zimmerman's wistful *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* induced powerful longing for the return to live theatre.

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For our first Rep On-Air offering of 2021, *Place/Settings: Berkeley*, we commissioned 10 well-known writers with deep ties to Berkeley, including Sarah Ruhl, Itamar Moses, Daniel Handler (aka Lemony Snicket), Richard Montoya, Aya de Leon, Philip Kan Gotanda, and others, to write about a Berkeley location meaningful or memorable to them. Some stories were fact, some were fiction, and all were inspired by each writers' very real connection to the city. The stories covered a wide range of subjects, including coming of age, otherness and belonging, loss and grief, the anxieties of new parenthood, and more. We released the stories in a weekly podcast and ticketholders received an illustrated map designed by *New Yorker* cartoonist and former Berkeley Rep box office employee Tom Toro that invited local listeners to safely venture out into the city to experience the stories on-location. *Place/Settings: Berkeley* garnered over 11,000 listens across its 10 episodes. As part of *Place/Settings: Berkeley*, we also partnered with local publication *Berkeleyside* to invite our community to share 100-word stories about

their own memorable locations in Berkeley. The response was so overwhelming *Berkeleyside* had to close the submission period early.

In April, we launched *The Waves In Quarantine*, a six movement video exploration of Lisa Peterson and David Bucknam's musical adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. Through hauntingly moving choral music, beautifully rendered visual imagery, and text from Woolf's novel, the project examined themes of friendship, love, isolation, and loss. The piece featured a talented cast, comprised of Carmen Cusack, Nikki Renée Daniels, Darius De Haas, Manu Narayan, Alice Ripley, and four-time Tony Award nominee Raúl Esparza (who co-conceived the project with Lisa Peterson). With the (online) help of Berkeley Rep's artistic and production teams, the cast filmed and recorded their own footage and audio from their various homes and locales. *The Waves in Quarantine* received over 17,000 views across its six video movements, and many international viewers registered to receive access to the show.



Manu Narayan in The Waves in Quarantine.

With *What's In a Play?*, Berkeley Rep's artistic staff offered free moderated discussions throughout the year about plays representing a wide range of forms and content. Some of the plays were chosen for their relevance to current events; others because they were by writers beloved by our audience; some were by writers, including past participants in our Ground Floor new play development program, whom our artistic staff loves but who were unfamiliar to our audience. Participants of a wide variety of backgrounds tuned in from all over the Bay Area, as well as from Australia, France, the UK, Brooklyn, and Kentucky, and many new friendships were formed. Artistic staff members noted that the discussions increased in richness over time, as regular participants honed their ability to engage rigorously and generously with the work and with each other. In 154 sessions during the 2020/21 season, total attendance numbers for *What's in a Play?* reached over 2,500 — with many repeat attendees from over 400 households.

The uncertainty of the times highlighted the importance of benchmarks beyond ticket sales — for example, having productions that inspired rich dialogue and a diverse and inclusive community of audiences, students, Board, staff, and artists. Overall, our core audiences deeply valued the shows, but overwhelmingly they have expressed that they miss live theatre. The audience feedback we received and data from national surveys has shown that, as we emerge from the pandemic, audiences appreciate having an online viewing option, even while their priority remains live entertainment. We look forward to continuing to explore how online tools can help us expand our reach and deepen audience engagement.

2020/21 NEW PLAY DEVELOPMENT

From the moment in-person theatre activities were suspended, Berkeley Rep recognized the need to center our commitment to serving artists. In addition to providing paid creative work to all the artists who participated in Rep On-Air as actors, designers, and more, we significantly increased our commissioning activity during this period. Commissions included five full-length works from Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal, Sarah Ruhl, Dipika Guha, Richard Montoya (the idea for which was sparked by his work on *Place/Settings: Berkeley*), and Jack Thorne and Nico Mulhy and an additional ten short commissions for a future *Place/Settings: Oakland* project — in total, we made 20 short and five full-length commissions in 2020/21. These commissions were a promise to artists, audiences, and ourselves that we would survive the existential challenges of the pandemic, and that when we did, there would be vibrant, vital stories awaiting us.

In August 2021, we hosted a scaled-down version of our Ground Floor Summer Lab, which in non-pandemic years gathers as many as 100 artists at our west Berkeley campus each summer to work on 12-22 projects. For the 2021 Summer Lab, we realized that the most significant impact the program could make in the current environment was to support our local arts community, so we hosted an all-local Summer Lab, inviting 27 local artists to work on 12 projects. The artists' palpable relief when they entered our building and saw other artists with whom to work after a year of isolation was as moving as it was momentous — it reminded us of the important role Berkeley Rep plays in the creation and development of new theatrical work. The generous artist-to-artist collaboration across projects was more striking this year than ever before, as artists served as each other's actors when needed, as well as audience members and respondents.



Artists in conversation at the 2021 Ground Floor Summer Lab.

The flexibility and responsiveness that is part of Summer Lab's DNA seemed tailor-made to meet the challenges of the moment. Our staff moved quickly to accommodate each project's evolving needs, including for one group of artists that made a last-minute decision to work remotely. The artists who chose to work in person with us enjoyed the endless opportunities for the creative use of space afforded by our versatile Harrison Street campus: one project experimented with movement on the courtyard lawn; another used the loading dock as the stage for a reading with a socially-distanced audience sitting in the back parking lot; an exterior balcony served as a rehearsal room one week and a writing/media space the next; and more. While we anticipate that Summer Lab 2022 will more closely resemble earlier Summer Labs, the lessons in collaboration, generosity, community, and flexibility that we learned in 2021 will continue to inform new play development at Berkeley Rep far into the future.

SCHOOL OF THEATRE

In late 2021, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre celebrates its 20th anniversary. In spite of challenges brought on by COVID-19, the School of Theatre has continued to program comprehensive arts learning opportunities for Bay Area children, teens, and adults. Through classroom workshops, classes, a vibrant Teen Council program, and more, the School's educational programming is a critical tool for connecting students of varied ages and backgrounds to the Theatre's work.

The School of Theatre offered a diverse array of 1-15-hour virtual in-class residencies for elementary, middle, and high school students in Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Mateo counties. A total of 878 students in 31 classrooms, 35% of which were in Title 1 schools, built



Elementary school students participate in a Story Builders workshop.

literacy, social, and emotional skills through curricula such as Story Builders, Change Makers, Performance Lab, and Improv, all taught over Zoom by Berkeley Rep's experienced teaching artists. Surveys conducted during the workshop periods helped teaching artist adapt to the needs of a new teaching environment and understand the challenges students were facing, such as technology and internet connection issues, childcare responsibilities, sharing learning spaces with siblings, and dealing with the social/emotional impacts and privacy concerns of peers and teachers seeing into their homes. For some students, staying off camera was the most effective way to log into class, and many students needed extra encouragement to take risks and participate in activities.



Berkeley USD summer students participate in a Story Builders workshop. (Photo by Cheshire Isaacs. **Not for public use.**)

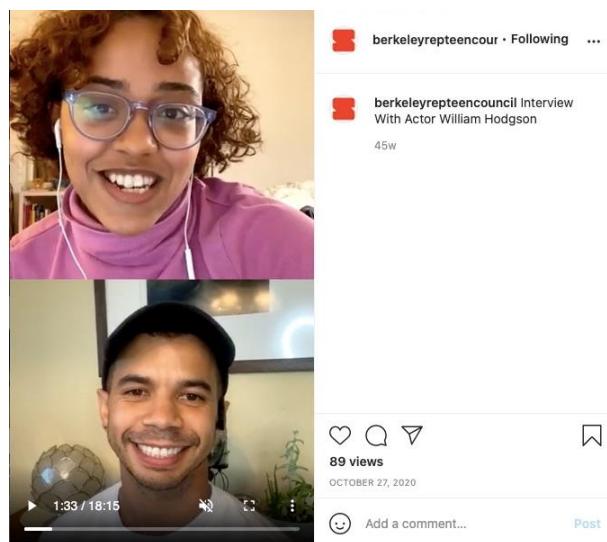
During the summer, Berkeley Rep coordinated with Freight & Salvage, Kala Art Institute, Shawl-Anderson Dance Center, City of Berkeley's Civic Arts Program, and Berkeley Unified School District to provide every Berkeley Unified School District elementary school student enrolled in the district's Summer Program with four in-person workshops in the visual and performing arts taught by one of the four arts organizations from their varied disciplines. During their time with Berkeley Rep's teaching artists, students participated in a four-hour Story Builders workshop.

In addition to supporting student learning, the multi-week nature of our in-class workshops also was instrumental in helping support Bay Area teaching artists. With the scarcity of work for artists during this period, many teaching artists were reticent to jeopardize vital unemployment benefits by accepting short one-off projects. With the help of government and private foundation funding, Berkeley Rep was able to provide guaranteed long-term employment through multi-week workshop commitments that served as an anchor around which teaching artists could build other employment opportunities.

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Berkeley Rep typically offers at least five student matinee performances each season for middle and high school students. With no in-person productions in 2020/21, the School of Theatre explored creative ways to offer a virtual student matinee experience. In the fall, School of Theatre staff welcomed the opportunity to experiment with a virtual student matinee for Ms. Awele's class at Skyline High School in Oakland. Using the study-guide the Theatre created for our 2018 production of Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me*, staff partnered with Ms. Awele to develop a curriculum about the show for her students, who watched the Broadway production on Amazon Prime. Our experience with Ms. Awele's class may provide a model for the Theatre to use technology in future to extend our reach into schools throughout Northern California without easy access to high-quality arts education programming and to accommodate schools unable to schedule field trips due to ongoing COVID-19 safety protocols.

Berkeley Rep's Teen Core Council, a group of student leaders from around the Bay Area, experimented with new ways to connect their peers to arts experiences online: activities included an online Teen Night, artist interviews on social media, and piloting a three-episode podcast series. In place of the annual Teen One-Acts Festival, the culminating Teen Council event was a 72-hour film festival. As with most of our programming, participation amongst our Teen populations was lower than in non-pandemic years. We recognize that it was a lot to ask even our most committed teens to spend their free time doing online activities when they were averaging a minimum of six hours online for school every day. We were pleased to be able to engage students with the Theatre's online content, and at the same time, we recognize that the lack of in-person activities made retaining participation and sustaining teens' interest in online programs difficult. Because of this, we anticipate challenges in the coming season as we work to build



Teen Council interview with actor William Thomas Hodgson.

strong relationships with Teen Council members, many of whom missed a full year of programming with us. As we monitor an ever-changing public health situation and respond to families' varying comfort levels with in-person programming, we look forward to easing back into our usual slate of Teen programming as the Theatre returns to in-person events in 2021/22.

After having paused the program in spring 2020, Berkeley Rep opened applications in summer 2021 for our prestigious Next Generation Fellowship Program for college graduates considering a career in the arts. Staff used the period while the program was dormant to create policies and procedures to allow us to reinstate it safely and include all the learning and mentorship opportunities that are central to Berkeley Rep's Fellowship experience. Berkeley Rep committed to continuing to provide fellows with free housing, which has been essential to helping candidates of a variety of economic backgrounds participate. To increase equitable access to the program, the Theatre also raised the fellows' stipend from \$700 to \$1,000 per month and removed the letter of recommendation requirement from the application process. The Next Generation Fellowship Program has long been a key element of Berkeley Rep's strategy to diversify its workforce and sector. As part of Berkeley Rep's recruitment efforts for the Fellowship program, beginning in May 2021 the School hosted a three-session online BIPOC Play Reading series for emerging BIPOC theatre makers, administrators, and technicians. To assist prospective Fellowship applicants, Berkeley Rep also hosted an online information session in July. More than 50 interested candidates participated live (many more watched the on-demand recording), as members of Berkeley Rep's staff and two former Fellows shared application tips, insights about life as a Fellow, and thoughts about future job opportunities as theatres nationwide begin to reopen. Berkeley Rep's 2021/22 Fellowship class will receive some training opportunities virtually this fall, and they will join the company in-person in January 2022.

REBRAND & WEBSITE RE-LAUNCH



Berkeley Rep's new logos designed by Pentagram.

When Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer joined the company in 2019/20, we felt the time was right to refresh Berkeley Rep's brand identity to reflect the bold imagination and spirit of innovation for which the Theatre is known. Berkeley Rep worked with graphic designer Paula Scher of New York-based design firm Pentagram and her team to develop a brand identity that establishes a bold and contemporary visual language for the Theatre in line with its programming and reputation. The new branding centers on a distinctive letter "B" inspired by the

shape of a ticket. The design system has helped to unify the Theatre's visual presence across its major programs — making them instantly recognizable as part of Berkeley Rep — and provide a cohesive look across promotion for all Berkeley Rep productions. In June 2021, Berkeley Rep unveiled our new brand image to coincide with the announcement of the Theatre's 2021/22 Season. As part of the rebrand, Berkeley Rep invested in a much-needed redesign of the Theatre's website. The redesign included both aesthetic changes to apply the Theatre's new branding across all pages and structural updates to make Berkeley Rep's website pages fully mobile-responsive, allowing users to navigate our website easily from any device.

2009 ADDISON ST

The 2009 Addison Street Workforce Housing project in downtown Berkeley that will contain 45 apartment units and two new School of Theatre spaces is currently on schedule with an expected completion date in August 2022. After a pause in work due to COVID-19, construction resumed on the project in December 2020. While there have been some issues with building material procurement this year, our general contractor has been able to keep supplies and building materials arriving on time.

In addition to the 45 apartment units for visiting artist and fellow housing, the building will house a large studio performance space that will provide the School of Theatre with a dedicated performance venue for the Teen

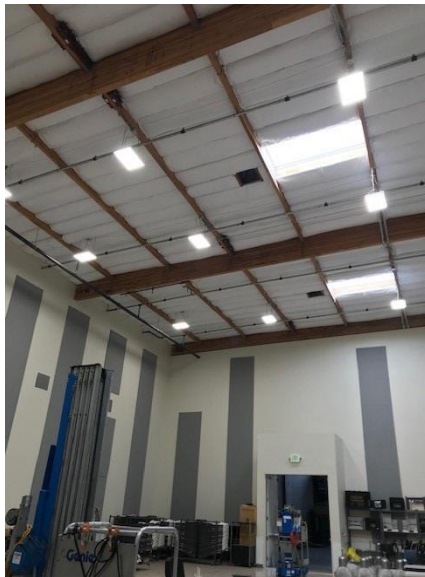


Progress on the 2009 Addison Street Workforce Housing project

One-Acts Festival and other presentations of student work. The space also will serve as a new home for The Ground Floor to showcase readings, workshop presentations, and other early stage work that would benefit from exposure to an audience. By giving The Ground Floor a public presence alongside our other venues, we hope to bring our audiences closer to the process of new play development and build a community of new-play advocates who feel invested in the trajectory of projects as they move through our pipeline.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Berkeley Rep used this period while the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted our regular operations to launch 5-year strategic initiatives focused on artistic programming, audience development, antiracism and inclusion, arts education, community dialogue, organization infrastructure, and climate change. In 2020/21, Trustees and staff worked closely to craft a vision for how these focus areas will inform the Theatre's internal and external operations over the next five years. While a few initiatives are still in an ideation stage, we have begun to take action on several recommendations made by the task forces.



Dimmable LED lights installed in the Taccone Rehearsal Hall in 2021

With administration and artistic staff primarily working remotely over the last 19 months, one major area identified by the infrastructure working group was updating technology to streamline the organization's information flow and communications tools. Upgrades have included transitioning to a new accounting software, consolidating communications onto Microsoft Teams, switching to a new phone system, and migrating our server files to SharePoint cloud-based data storage solutions. In addition, our Production departments have helped to identify a significant amount of outdated sound, lighting, and other stage equipment that will need to be replaced over the next five years; we are in the process of developing a plan and budget for acquiring this essential equipment.

Infrastructure upgrades have the twin benefit of improving the organization's operations and helping advance the Theatre's climate initiatives. Since 2007, Berkeley Rep has made a conscious commitment to energy responsibility. In 2020/21, with wildfires and other climate-related disasters impacting our communities and underscoring the urgency for action, Berkeley Rep reaffirmed our responsibility to contribute to the well-being of our planet and we began outlining a path toward carbon neutrality. Efforts have included our shifting to LED lighting in our rehearsal halls and in the Nevo Education Center; we hope soon to transition our theatrical stage lights to LEDs. The pandemic has reduced our dependence on in-person meetings, thereby decreasing the need for travel and lowering our greenhouse gas emissions.

Ongoing conversations among our Board and our staff about the Theatre's role and responsibility as a resource to the community have foregrounded the importance of expanding the Theatre's relationship to our community through deep, non-transactional partnerships. As a result, Berkeley Rep has created In Dialogue, a new programmatic initiative that will place the capacity of our theatre-making skills and resources in service of our community. In 2020/21 we appointed a new Associate Managing Director who, in collaboration with a soon-to-be-hired Associate Artistic Director, will lead development of In Dialogue. In 2021/22, the Theatre will design a multiyear plan for In Dialogue and lay the groundwork for identifying community partners to help guide the program's direction. Our goal over the next five years is to transform our relationship to the community by creating a department equal in scope and ambition to our other major programs that reimagines what it means to do community outreach as an arts institution.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION, & ANTIRACISM

Berkeley Rep is committed to becoming an antiracist organization through the efforts of our Board, management, and staff. We are committed to ensuring Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are holistically represented throughout all levels of our organization: on our Board, in leadership roles, on- and backstage, and in our offices, rehearsal rooms, production facilities, and audience.

Over the last year, half of each Board meeting was dedicated to discussions of equity and antiracism. The Board Governance Committee reviewed and amended board policies and the Board nomination process to affirm that financial obligations are not a barrier to Board participation. Two-thirds of new trustees who joined us in 2020/21 identify as BIPOC. In March, our Board antiracism task force transformed into an ongoing Board/staff antiracism working group. The Board/staff antiracism working group is comprised of equal numbers of Board and staff, and serves as a space for ongoing JEDI dialogue, education, and planning, while creating a structure for internal accountability.

In addition to our ongoing BIPOC Affinity Space and a White Action/Learning Space, in December 2020 Berkeley Rep staff created a staff-led education committee to program and facilitate antiracism conversations and trainings during all-staff meetings. These ongoing discussions have provided a space for staff to analyze current and past policies, experiences, and company culture to identify opportunities for change to Berkeley Rep's internal and external practices. Educational sessions have addressed topics like characteristics of white supremacy culture and understanding privilege and have created space for exploring ideas like personal and institutional values.

Berkeley Rep's Director of Human Resources and Diversity has led an in-depth audit of the Theatre's recruitment, selection, and hiring practices, and we are now in the process of formalizing a new hiring policy. We have revised job postings with a critical eye toward eliminating language and requirements that may result in gatekeeping, and we have reconfigured our hiring committees to be at least half BIPOC. We also conducted a wage analysis and will continue to post salary ranges for all open positions publicly.

In March of 2021, Berkeley Rep staff participated in two three-hour workshops with Circle Up Education, a local organization that provides trainings and coaching on diversity, inclusion, interrupting implicit bias, restorative justice approaches, and communication skills. The first session helped staff attendees to create shared definitions and understanding about concepts of racism and bias. The second session provided staff with strategies for initiating conversations to address questionable behavior in the workplace.

Throughout 2020/21, Berkeley Rep's executive leadership team with input from the Board and staff worked to draft an Antiracism Commitment, which was posted on the Theatre's website in September 2021. The statement acknowledges Berkeley Rep's power and privilege as a historically and predominantly white legacy theatre that has profited from the knowledge, stories, and bodies of Black and brown people; outlines the actions we have taken so far in our antiracism work; and affirms our commitment to continue the work of becoming an organization that welcomes, supports, and honors the fullness and complexity of all people's identities.

RESILIENCE

We are deeply grateful for the pandemic relief we have received from the government, which, combined with strong support for the Resilience Campaign by some of our most generous individual donors, has helped the Theatre finish 2020/21 with a modest operating surplus and will support our estimated \$19.9 million 2021/22 fiscal year budget. Berkeley Rep's 2021 OVATION signature fundraising event hosted by *Saturday Night Live* star and Berkeley Rep School of Theatre alum Chloe Fineman raised over \$500,000 in support of the Theatre and featured appearances by The Avett Brothers; Amber Iman; John Gallagher, Jr.; Raúl Esparza; Kuhoo Verma; and legendary actor Tom Hanks.

In spring of 2021, Berkeley Rep secured a contract to build the set for the touring production of *Ain't Too Proud—The Life and Times of The Temptations* (which had its world premiere at Berkeley Rep), which allowed us to bring back several furloughed members of our production team. Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) support in 2020/21 along with Shuttered Venue Operators Grants (SVOG) and Supplemental SVOG funds allocated to our 2021/22 fiscal year have also allowed Berkeley Rep to begin rehiring a limited number of positions lost during the pandemic and to instate new roles — such as a Director of Patron Experience, a senior-level position tasked with reimagining Front of House policies and procedures to make our theatres more welcoming, safe, accessible, and inclusive for all visitors, and a COVID Control Officer responsible for overseeing the Theatre's COVID-19 safety protocols — that will be vital to the Theatre's future success.

We have learned in every downturn that our audience values ambitious storytelling and artistic excellence. We have always responded to adversity by offering a bold season and been rewarded with robust community support. As we make our return to live, in-person programming this fall, we are audacious even in a moment of scarcity. Our 2021/22 subscription season includes three significant world premieres, two west coast premieres, and two projects

developed in The Ground Floor. It features both emerging and established artists and diverse voices and visions; artists of color created three of the seven subscription season plays and women wrote the book or script of four.

Even as we commit to works of scale and double down on our commitment to artists, we are making hard choices as we reimagine our entire operation with radical flexibility – everything from the way we develop production calendars, and write employment contracts to new ticketing options. We are deciding how, when, and what roles to rehire to support our return to in-person programming and adapting our workplaces, performance spaces, and classrooms to the many changes imposed by COVID-19. We are in uncharted territory, and virtually everything in our 2021/22 season is equal parts experiment, opportunity, and risk.

During the 2021/22 season, we are piloting new, flexible ticketing packages (RepFlex and Rep Passport) that respond both to the ticket-buying habits of new, younger audiences and to concerns about possible show cancellations due to COVID-19. We also plan to make streamed recordings of each subscription season show available to subscribers who are unable or unwilling to attend 2021/22 performances due to COVID-19 or other reasons.

While the pandemic has challenged us in ways we never expected, it also created opportunities for us to learn, experiment, and grow. As we resume in-person programming this fall we will build on what we have learned during this period and emerge better, stronger, and more resilient than we were when the pandemic started.

Thank you again for your generous support of the Berkeley Rep. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Kelsey Scott, Institutional Grants Manager, at 510 647-2908 or kscott@berkeleyrep.org.