

Press Contact:

Tim Etheridge, Director of Public Relations
510 647-2917; tetheridge@berkeleyrep.org

Full Gala Video
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For Immediate Release

BERKELEY REP'S OVATION VIRTUAL GALA EXCEEDS GOAL AND RAISES \$590,000
Online event celebrated 20th anniversary of the School of Theatre

Event was hosted by *Saturday Night Live*'s Chloe Fineman with special appearances by Tom Hanks, Raúl Esparza, John Gallagher, Jr., The Avett Brothers, Amber Iman, and Kuhoo Verma

June 8, 2021 – This past Saturday evening, June 5, Bay Area arts supporters gathered for a live stream event to celebrate Berkeley Repertory Theatre's plan to reopen this fall and to honor the 20th anniversary of its School of Theatre. Berkeley Rep's **OVATION: *Imagine*** was attended by over 500 people, tuning in from home and in private catered gatherings around the Bay Area.

"One of my greatest sources of pride I take from Berkeley Rep is the culture of learning and teaching that we have imbued within everyone in our organization," said Managing Director Susie Medak. "Berkeley Rep has been committed to education since 1985, and in 2001, we were able to create a permanent place for our School of Theatre. We were able to expand the number of classes and the number of schools we visited, and we were able to create one of Berkeley Rep's most lauded programs, The Teen Council. It is wonderful to reflect and honor 20 years of our beloved School of Theatre."

For safety precautions due to the pandemic, **OVATION** was held virtually for the second year but still surpassed its goal, raising over **\$590,000** in support of the nonprofit's ambitious artistic endeavors, education programs, and the transformative power of theatre.

"As 2021 moves along, we are one step closer to being together," said Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer. "We are counting down the days until we are back in our beautiful theatres with everyone. Theatre does not exist without the presence of an audience."

Hosted by School of Theatre alum and current *Saturday Night Live* cast member **Chloe Fineman**, this year's event was an evening of imagination and inspiration with an emphasis on entertainment. The evening began with Tony Award-nominated actor **Raúl Esparza** (currently seen in the Theatre's film project ***The Waves in Quarantine***) singing a beautiful rendition of "The Song Remembers When."

Berkeley Rep's first School of Theatre Education Director, Rachel Fink, paid a special tribute saying, "We created a haven. We created a home for people from all over the Bay Area to come and express their creativity and use and access their voice. Being engaged with art is not an extra, it is a part of everyday life that everyone has a right to and that everyone should actively participate in. I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to know that my incredible colleagues are celebrating 20 years of the School of Theatre."

Bay Area native and Oscar-winning actor Tom Hanks made a special message for the Theatre, saying, "Berkeley Rep is a miracle. You don't have to go anywhere else on the planet to see something on such a high level of excellence and involvement as Berkeley Rep. The pandemic has taken away theatre, but it is coming back. And I don't think there's anything that is more important than the communal experience of getting together with perhaps a bunch of strangers to support a company of actors that puts on a continually bodacious program of theatrical art."

Attendees to **OVATION** were given a sneak peek of the 2021-22 season with performances from several actors who will appear in upcoming world premiere musicals, including **John Gallagher, Jr. (*Swept Away*, January 2022)**; **Amber Iman**, who performed “Honey Sweet” from ***Goddess*** (March 2022); and **Kuhoo Verma**, who performed “Beautiful” from the West Coast premiere of ***Octet*** (April 2022). **The Avett Brothers**, whose music will be featured in ***Swept Away***, performed the titular song from that show.

In keeping with the virtual gala’s theme of *Imagine*, the evening closed with a video montage of Berkeley Rep staff, board members, and actors sharing what they imagine when the Theatre reopens this fall.

Berkeley Rep’s OVATION is made possible by the generosity of visionary sponsors **Jill & Steve Fugaro, Bruce Golden & Michelle Mercer, Marcia Grand, The Strauch Kulhanjian Family, and Gail & Arne Wagner.**

The planning committee for the event was helmed by co-chairs **Sandra Eggers, Jill Fugaro, and Laura Severino.** Additional members include **Deborah Barrera, Ronnie Caplane, Narsai M. David, Rich Edwards, Robin Edwards, Scott Haber, Sandra McCandless, Sudha Pennathur, Margaret Rothschild, Audrey Rose Sockolov, Jean Strunsky, Gail Wagner, and Susan Wolin.**

For the 2021 season, Berkeley Rep recognizes the generous support of **BART and Peet’s Coffee,** Berkeley Rep’s official season sponsors. Berkeley Rep is also delighted to have **Bruce Golden and Michelle Mercer, Jack and Betty Schafer, The Strauch Kulhanjian Family, Frances Hellman and Warren Breslau, and Michael and Sue Steinberg** on board as season sponsors. **Rep On-Air** is supported by a generous gift from **The Bernard Osher Foundation.**

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. Be a Rep. Learn more at [berkeleyrep.org](https://www.berkeleyrep.org)

ABOUT THE SCHOOL OF THEATRE

Berkeley Rep creates ambitious theatre that entertains and challenges its audiences, provokes civic engagement, and inspires people to experience the world in new and surprising ways. The School of Theatre supports this mission through meaningful connections between audiences and our mainstage work, creative entry points for new audiences, tools for artists and students to harness their imaginative power, and immersive training for future theatre makers.

Having first opened its doors in 2001, the School of Theatre offers programming as eclectic as the productions onstage at Berkeley Rep, reaching some 20,000 people in the Bay Area each year. Driven by an expanding community of inspired, curious, and creative theatre lovers, the School’s programming provides opportunities for engagement on a variety of levels.

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