

Berkeley Repertory Theatre

2018-19 Season Final Report

Berkeley Rep's 2018-19 season was a year of celebration and recognition of its 50-year history. Since its founding in 1968, Berkeley Rep has grown from a storefront stage on College Avenue to an international leader in innovative theatre. In that time, more than 5.5 million people have seen nearly 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 80 world premieres, 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. In the previous 2018-19 season, Berkeley Rep mounted our largest cast production yet (*Paradise Square*), received numerous accolades for recent work nurtured at Berkeley Rep, installed an archival timeline at the Theatre, and celebrated Tony Taccone's final show as Artistic Director. It was also a year of transformation and forward motion: in September 2018, the Theatre was thrilled to announce that Johanna Pfaelzer would become Berkeley Rep's next artistic director at the start of the 2019-20 season. Johanna served for 12 years as the highly respected artistic director of New York Stage and Film (NYSAF), an organization dedicated to nurturing emerging and established artists in the development and production of theatre and film. Along with strong leadership skills, Johanna brings a keen awareness of the field's most visionary artists. She will continue to shepherd relationships with Berkeley Rep's beloved long-time collaborators and introduce new artists to the fold.

Berkeley Rep opened its 2018-19 season with Lucas Hnath's incisive comedy *A Doll's House, Part 2*, which picks up 15 years after Nora slammed the door on her marriage and children in the revolutionary final scene of Henrik Ibsen's signature play. It was a pleasure to welcome former Berkeley Rep associate artistic director and long-time artistic collaborator Les Waters (*Dear Elizabeth*; *In the Next Room, or the vibrator play*; and *Fêtes de la Nuit*; among many others) back to Berkeley to direct this piece. After playing to Berkeley audiences in fall 2018, *A Doll's House, Part 2* moved to Boston in January 2019 for a run at the Huntington Theater Company, our co-producing partner.

While *A Doll's House, Part 2* played in the Roda Theatre, the world premiere of Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Fairview*, a co-commission with Soho Rep that received extensive development through The Ground Floor, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work, discomfited and exhilarated audiences in the Peet's Theatre.

Fairview premiered at Soho Rep in association with Berkeley Rep in the summer of 2018, where it extended three times and became one of Soho Rep's most notable hits. In its review, the New York Times raved that *Fairview* is "a glorious, scary reminder of the unmatched power of live theater to rattle, roil and shake us wide awake." *Fairview* transferred to

Berkeley Rep in October 2018 and received rave reviews. With its challenging meta-theatrical structure, unique technical needs, and radical explosion of what it means to be actor and audience, *Fairview* demanded that Berkeley Rep think expansively about how it brought this piece to life and engaged audience members. Berkeley Rep held post-show discussions following every performance of *Fairview* for audiences to process their complex reactions to the show. We hired outside facilitator and director Khanisha Foster (who also participated in the 2018 Ground Floor Summer Lab) to train discussion



Natalie Venetia Belcon (Beverly) in Berkeley Rep's production of *Fairview*. Photo courtesy of Kevin Berne/Berkeley Repertory Theatre

moderators in how to guide fruitful conversations around challenging topics, including identity, race, privilege, and power. In April 2019, *Fairview* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Drama, a testament to its extraordinary contribution to the American theatre. We are immensely proud to have been a part of this project's journey.

Fairview was followed by *Pike St.*, virtuoso performer Nilaja Sun's eloquent tale of three generations of a Puerto Rican-American family facing a threatening hurricane. Originally part of the 2017-18 season, *Pike St.* was cancelled due to scheduling conflicts and rebooked in 2018-19 as a special event production. In January 2019, we launched the world premiere of *Paradise Square: A New Musical*, which assembled the extraordinary talents of director Moisés Kaufman, playwright Marcus Gardley, and choreographer Bill T. Jones to explore a little-known slice of American history. In 1863, the Five Points neighborhood of New York City was one of the few places in America where interracial relationships flourished, and the intercultural exchange between newly emancipated African Americans and recent Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famine led to the creation of new hybrid art forms. Featuring a variety of musical and dance traditions including Irish step, juba, and tap, *Paradise Square* subverts and reframes some of the most popular music of the 19th century while honoring and celebrating the unique New York Five Points neighborhood's diverse inhabitants and their experiences. With a 32-member cast and eight-piece band, *Paradise Square* is the largest show that has appeared on a Berkeley Rep stage. For comparison, the average cast size of other large-scale musicals we have done is half that number, with our previous record, *American Idiot*, at 21. After a sold-out two weeks of previews and a well-attended scheduled run, the show was extended twice and a second student matinee was added due to overwhelming demand. Over 37,000 tickets were issued, and more than 1,000 middle and high school students saw the show through Berkeley Rep's Teen Night and Student Matinee program.



(front row, l to r) Hailee Kaleem Wright (Ensemble), Karen Burthwright (Ensemble), and Sidney Dupont (William Henry Lane); (back row, l to r) Chloé Davis (Ensemble), Sir Brock Warren (Ensemble), Jamal Christopher Douglas (Ensemble), and Jacobi Hall (Ensemble) in the world premiere of *Paradise Square: A New Musical* at Berkeley Rep. Photo courtesy of Alessandra Mello/Berkeley Repertory Theatre

As *Paradise Square* played in the Roda Theatre, we welcomed perennial audience favorite Mary Zimmerman and her breathtaking *Metamorphoses* into the Peet's Theatre. *Metamorphoses*, which dramatizes selections of Ovid's myths, last appeared at Berkeley Rep in the 1999-2000 season; it later received a Broadway run and garnered a Tony Award. Several members of the original creative team returned for this season's production, and many community members who had seen the original production returned to see the remount. One audience member wrote, "I love this show, now more than ever. I never forgot it after seeing it 20 years ago, and now it seems better than ever." We were thrilled to bring this transformative piece to our audiences before it traveled to our co-producing partner, the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis. Next, Obie Award-winning physical theatre artist Geoff Sobelle and his company brought us *HOME*, an immersive piece that uses live music, audience participation, clever engineering, and theatrical illusions to explore the concept of home as a physical place and a state of mind. With its nearly wordless and non-linear format, *HOME* pushes the boundaries of what it means to create and participate in a piece of theatre--it was a delight to share this unique and moving experience with our audiences.



(front, l to r) Chad Carstarphen (El Jaguar Negro), Jesús E. Martínez (Ensemble), Angelica Beliard (Ensemble), and Richard Henry Ruiz (Ensemble); (background) Maria-Christina Oliveras (Tolima) in the world premiere of *Kiss My Aztec!* at Berkeley Rep, directed by Tony Taccone. Photo courtesy of Kevin Berne/Berkeley Repertory Theatre

In spring, Denis O'Hare and Lisa Peterson's *The Good Book* explored one of the world's most formative texts—the Bible—through three distinct yet connected stories: a devout young man struggling to reconcile his belief with his identity; an atheist biblical scholar trying to find meaning as she faces her own mortality; and the creative journey of the Bible itself—from ancient Mesopotamia to medieval Ireland to suburban America. Audiences responded warmly to the skilled performances of the excellent ensemble of actors and, via post-show discussions and surveys, continued the conversation about faith and belonging begun in the play.

While audiences in the Peet's Theatre ruefully recognized themselves in iconic Chicago-based sketch comedy troupe Second City's special event production of *Left Leaning and Always Right*, a satirical take-down of the Bay Area's liberal bubble, the subscription season ended on a high note with the world

premiere new musical *Kiss My Aztec!*. Co-written by longtime collaborators John Leguizamo and Tony Taccone and featuring an all-Latinx creative team, this fresh, irreverent, and outrageous musical comedy celebrates Latinx culture and skewers the insidious effects of colonialism. Though set in 16th Century Mesoamerica, *Kiss My Aztec!* draws inspiration from a myriad of musical styles— everything from salsa to merengue, reggaeton, Latin freestyle, cumbia, and tango – and employs a humorous blend of Elizabethan diction and contemporary slang. Hungry to celebrate the rich culture of Latin America and to address the dearth of compelling Latinx characters in American theatre, John began exploring the idea for a play about the Aztec Empire more than ten years ago. Developed and produced with the extraordinary support of The Roy Cockrum Foundation, *Kiss My Aztec!* played to Berkeley audiences in June and July 2019 before traveling to La Jolla Playhouse this fall. While local audiences had both strong positive and negative responses to the show's low-brow humor and strong political message, *Kiss My Aztec!*, drew new audiences to the theatre (16% of ticket buyers identified as Latinx/Hispanic; average Latinx/Hispanic attendance is 4%), We are incredibly proud to have premiered this work of high artistic caliber and social significance on our stage.

Tony has said that his proudest accomplishment during his tenure at Berkeley Rep was the establishment of The Ground Floor, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work. Since its inception in 2011, The Ground Floor has allowed the organization to grow its relationships within the artistic community in order to engage in a vastly more comprehensive and ambitious process for new play development. Program activities include Berkeley Rep's artist commissioning program, workshops, readings, a weekly writers' room, and the annual Summer Residency Lab. We are proud that ten plays have transitioned from the Summer Residency Lab to a Berkeley Rep stage, including *Fairview* this season, and many others have been produced at theatres throughout the nation, including on Broadway. In June, we hosted 18 projects at our eighth Summer Residency Lab. In all, 85 playwrights, directors, composers, actors, and other artists assembled at our Harrison Street campus to collaborate, share ideas, and forge new artistic relationships.



Community volunteers helped Sam Pinkleton, nicHi douglas, and Pig Iron Theatre Company explore movement in their piece *House of Victory* during the 2019 Summer Lab.

The organization's deep commitment to new work can also be seen in the selection of its next artistic director, Johanna Pfaelzer. After a year and a half long search, Berkeley Rep's Board announced Johanna's appointment last fall. Johanna has served as the artistic director of New York Stage and Film (NYSAF) for the last decade. NYSAF is entirely dedicated to the development and production of new works for theatre and film and has been a creative home for projects like *Hamilton*, *The Humans*, and Taylor Mac's *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*. A number of projects developed during Johanna's tenure at NYSAF have also received developmental support from Berkeley Rep including Anaïs Mitchell's *Hadestown*, Green Day's *American Idiot*, and Marcus Gardley's *The House that will not Stand*. In 2018-19, Johanna worked quarter-time for Berkeley Rep as she completed her final season at NYSAF. This allowed Johanna to begin to get to know Berkeley Rep's staff, Board, donors, and audiences before she joined us full-time in September 2019, and to program her inaugural season in collaboration with Berkeley Rep staff (see grant chart for list of season shows). Through the season planning process, we learned that Johanna is tenacious in pursuit of what she thinks is important and possesses a healthy pragmatism. Johanna brings with her a deep knowledge of artists working in the field and her own rich artistic relationships. We are confident that Johanna will lead the organization to future success, and we are excited by the energetic evolution she brings to the Berkeley Rep's next chapter.



Johanna Pfaelzer serves as artistic director of the Tony Award-winning Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Photo by Cheshire Isaacs/Berkeley Repertory Theatre

In 2018-19, Berkeley Rep became the first LORT theatre outside of New York to make GalaPro available to its audiences. This service, available free-of-charge to all patrons, delivers closed captions to the user's own mobile device for every performance (Berkeley Rep also has units that may be checked out for use). We continued to offer assistive listening devices in addition to the new GalaPro service. Internally, Berkeley Rep staff have also adopted new software and learned new skills to support Deaf and hard of hearing individuals over the past year. After this year of learning and capacity building, the organization is better equipped to support Deaf and hard-of-hearing staff, participants in our year-long fellowship program, and visiting artists in the future.

Throughout the summer of 2019, Berkeley Rep provided anti-bias trainings for all our front-of-house staff, docents, ushers, and box office workers, as well as approximately 250 of A.C.T.'s ushers and front-of-house staff. These individuals are often the first at the Theatre to interact with the public; we believe that anti-bias training will help make Berkeley Rep a truly welcoming place for all audiences. All told, 1,432 people participated in this summer's trainings. Director and facilitator Khanisha Foster (who led trainings for *Fairview* post-show discussion moderators last fall) returned to lead these sessions. We are thrilled with Khanisha's participation and the thoughtful conversations she has guided, and we plan to provide a staff-wide anti-bias training in January 2020.

Encouraging civic engagement among Berkeley Rep audiences and staff remains a key organizational priority. Over the past year, Berkeley Rep staff and Board members continued to refine the Theatre's Citizen Rep initiative that explores how Berkeley Rep should engage civically both as an institution and as a collection of individuals. One thing we learned last year is that institutional civic activities are most

successful when they relate closely to our onstage work. Recent activities include cast-led fundraisers: the *Paradise Square* cast held a cabaret fundraiser for victims of the Paradise, CA fire and the *Kiss My Aztec!* team raised over \$40,000 for two organizations supporting immigrant rights at the U.S.-Mexico border, RAICES/Border Angels. 2018-19 Teen Council members also engaged in local civic action by registering other young people to vote in September and sending a group of six teens to Arts Advocacy day in Sacramento. Citizen Rep also helped connect Berkeley Rep staff members to opportunities to support the community last year, including a cleanup of nearby Codornices Creek and the Bay Area Outreach Recreation Program (BORP), which provides community and mentorship to physically disabled children age 5-18.

Berkeley Rep is proud to run one of the most comprehensive arts education programs of any professional arts organization in California, with year-round onsite classes for children, teens, and adults and arts education programming for grade 2-12 classrooms in 75 Bay Area schools. During the 2018-19 season, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre engaged 22,614 children, teens, and adults through in-class workshops, onsite classes, student matinees, Teen Council activities, interactive events tied in with our mainstage shows, and exhibitions of student work. The School of Theatre also extended 64 full and partial scholarships totaling \$30,000 in program services to ensure that low-income students could access onsite classes at the School.

The School of Theatre offers Bay Area schools a wide range of in-class theatre-based workshops that align with national and state arts education standards. Drawing on acting, movement, voice, and playwriting techniques, professional teaching artists help students access their creativity, hone their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and encourage Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Teaching artists work carefully with classroom teachers to tailor the workshop to students' unique needs, and some residencies are also available in bi-lingual formats (English and Spanish). The School of Theatre is in the third year of developing its 10-week civics-based curriculum that combines playwriting with design-thinking in order to explore social justice issues. Tiered pricing helps keep our in-school workshops affordable for schools with fewer financial resources – last spring, an astonishing 89% of workshops (98% of hours) were provided to Title-1 schools. The School offers one free hour of instruction to public middle and high school in the nine-county Bay Area per year (based on availability). Last season we offered free programming to every Grade 3 class in Berkeley and 96 hours of fully subsidized workshops to Daly City schools.



Students at Anna Yates Elementary participate in the pilot Change Makers curriculum, which combines design-thinking and playwriting to explore social justice issues.

Berkeley Rep welcomed over 2,000 students to six student matinee performances in the 2018-19 season. Performances that are a part of the student matinee series are reserved exclusively for student groups at only \$10 per ticket. The School of Theatre provides study guides prior to the performances, offers free pre-show workshops at the theatre (15 were conducted before 2018-19 student matinees), and invites students to participate in post-show Q&As with the cast. For the third year in a row, Berkeley Rep also made transportation subsidies available to schools with financial need. Post-matinee teacher surveys consistently reveal that 50-100% of their students who attend a student matinee performance at Berkeley Rep are experiencing live theatre for the first time. In the 2019-20 season, Berkeley Rep plans to offer nine student matinees to productions of main season shows, which will bring as many as 4,000 Bay Area students to see a show at Berkeley Rep.



Teen performers in Nandi Maunder's *Help Wanted: A Witness* during the 2019 Teen One-Acts Festival. Other 2019 plays included *Oneironauts* by Eleanor Boes and *The Dream Collector* by Zeke Gerwein

Berkeley Rep's groundbreaking teen programming, including the Teen Council and Young Writers of Color Collective (YWoCC), serves approximately 400 grade 9-12 students a year from all over the Bay Area. This season, teens will see plays at local theatres (including seven Teen Nights at Berkeley Rep), and participate in interactive workshops and interviews with professional artists and arts administrators from Berkeley Rep and beyond. The annual Teen One-Acts Festival, the Rough Draft playwriting workshop series, and the Young Writers of Color Collective give teens a platform to express themselves, develop their creative voices, and get hands-on experience in the theatre-making process from working artists. Each year, Berkeley Rep's Next Generation Fellowship program helps to prepare 15 college graduates for future leadership roles in theatre management and production. The program is also Berkeley Rep's primary means of recruiting and training exceptional candidates of color with the goal of diversifying its own workforce and increasing the multiplicity of voices in the field. To coincide with Berkeley Rep's 50th anniversary season, we surveyed past fellows going back to the 1982-83 season and found that out of 275 respondents, 247 former fellows have worked in the arts at some point following their fellowship and that 51% have held leadership positions in theatre. From both formal and informal feedback, we know that the

experience the Berkeley Rep Fellowship provides is invaluable regardless of whether graduates go on to a career in the arts.

Berkeley Rep offers audiences many additional opportunities to engage with the work onstage. These include lobby displays, a podcast series, program articles, actor Q&As, moderated discussions with members of shows' creative teams, panel discussions about show content and themes with community leaders or field experts, and the volunteer docent program. Last season, over 7,000 people attended a docent-led discussion or talk.

Our 2018-19 season included a number of major infrastructure-building projects. This year we completed the first phase of a two-part energy upgrade with PG&E and transitioned all non-theatrical lighting at our Harrison Street campus to LED fixtures. This retrofit has resulted in an annual \$24,000 reduction in our utility bills. Phase two involves converting our theatrical lighting to LEDs. We are currently looking for funding for this ambitious project, which we hope to begin next summer. In the past year, Berkeley Rep also has upgraded our safety protocols, made critical repairs and energy-efficient upgrades to the Theatre's HVAC systems, and has planned a seismic retrofit of our warehouse and scene shop spaces at our Harrison Street campus which will take place next year.

One of the most pressing financial challenges facing Berkeley Rep is the skyrocketing cost of housing in the Bay Area. Costs to house visiting artists and fellows have tripled for Berkeley Rep in the last 10 years—to a staggering \$1.6 million in the current season—and they continue to rise. To address these mounting costs, Berkeley Rep has secured low-interest financing through Signature Bank to build 45 apartment units on a site next to the Roda and Peet's theatres in downtown Berkeley. This LEED Gold-certified building also will include two spaces for the School of Theatre, an outdoor terrace, and an 88-foot video display marquee. This project broke ground in November 2019 and has an estimated construction timeline of eighteen months. We are confident that building our own housing is the right next step for Berkeley Rep's long-term financial stability and have the unanimous support of our board.



A rendering of the artist housing at 2009 Addison Street.

Berkeley Rep's investment in new play development continues to introduce relevant, smart, original plays into the repertoire of American theatre. After captivating audiences in Berkeley, we are proud that several projects nurtured at Berkeley Rep have gone on to enjoy wider acclaim in the past year. In addition to winning the Pulitzer Prize in Drama following its 2018-19 world premiere at Soho Rep and Berkeley Rep, Jackie Sibbles Drury's *Fairview* was remounted by Soho Rep in New York this past summer, and it will be produced at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, DC and at the Young Vic in London in their 2019-20 seasons. John Leguizamo's *Latin History for Morons* (which was developed via The Ground Floor and premiered in Berkeley Rep's 2015-16 season) had a successful Broadway run that was filmed for Netflix in 2018 and launched a North American tour in September 2019. Anaïs Mitchell's musical *Hadestown*, which was developed in the 2015 Berkeley Rep Ground Floor Summer Lab, had a critically-acclaimed run at the National Theatre in London last winter, followed by a 2019 Broadway production that won several Tony Awards, including Best Musical. Smash hit *Ain't Too Proud* broke Berkeley Rep box office records when it premiered in the 2017-18 season and opened on Broadway in March 2019. It received several Tony Award nominations and won for Best Choreography. It begins a nationwide tour in July 2020. Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me* had its west coast premiere in Berkeley Rep's 2017-18 season, enjoyed a Broadway run this past summer, and was honored at the 2019 Tony Awards. It begins its nationwide tour in 2020. The musical adaptation of Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*, which has received significant further development after premiering in Berkeley Rep's 2016-17 season, is slated to appear in London's West End in summer 2020. A new production of *Amélie, A New Musical* is currently playing in London after a 2015 Berkeley Rep premiere and 2017 Broadway run.

With the strong support of its deeply committed community of funders, Berkeley Rep has continued to expand on its mission to develop and produce ambitious artistic projects, deepen our relationships with commissioned playwrights and visiting artists, present innovative productions to Bay Area audiences, and harness the imaginations of community members of all ages through dynamic arts education programs. We deeply appreciate your support during the 2018-19 season. If you have any questions or would like further information please contact Lynn Eve Komaromi, Director of Development, at 510 647-2903 or lynneve@berkeleyrep.org.



Thank you from all of us at Berkeley Rep!