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LES WATERS RETURNS TO BERKELEY REP WITH SARAH RUHL’S DEAR ELIZABETH

Acclaimed collaborators paint a portrait of renowned poets Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop

APRIL 4, 2013 – To conclude its 45th season, Berkeley Repertory Theatre welcomes back a pair of acclaimed collaborators: Sarah Ruhl and Les Waters, the creators of Eurydice, Three Sisters, and In the Next Room (or the vibrator play), return to Berkeley Rep with another tale of love and longing. Dear Elizabeth follows the beautiful and bittersweet friendship between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell. Across oceans and continents, across three decades, these esteemed poets found a true marriage of minds in their eloquent correspondence. Dubbed the Dickinson and Whitman of the 20th century, they traded hundreds of vibrant, witty, and passionate letters that now spring to life on stage. This West Coast premiere paints an intimate portrait of two extraordinary – and quite ordinary – lives, told anew by two of the finest artists of our time. Ruhl and Waters deliver Dear Elizabeth to the Roda Theatre, where it begins previews on May 24, opens May 29, and runs through July 7. In this new production, Mary Beth Fisher portrays Elizabeth Bishop and Tom Nelis plays Robert Lowell.

“It’s a delight to come back to Berkeley Rep, which has been an artistic home for me – and for Sarah – for many years,” Waters remarks. “It’s always a pleasure to direct in the Bay Area, as audiences here crave smart and savvy new works. I hope that they are as engaged by this subtle and touching story as we have been.”

“I'm so happy to be working again at Berkeley Rep with Les,” Ruhl remarks. “I think there is no better town to receive an unconventional love story between two brilliant and unconventional poets. I was terribly moved when Les signed on to direct the play before I’d finished writing it, and when Tony signed on to produce it while it was still in process. Having an artistic home like that in this day in age is rare and radical.”

Dear Elizabeth “mesmerizes in every way,” declares the New Haven Register. “Playgoers need only learn that playwright Sarah Ruhl and director Les Waters have collaborated once again on a new work to know that all is right with their world… The result is yet another articulate,

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imaginative and moving theatrical experience.” “Fascinating,” raves the Connecticut Post. “A play about the correspondence between two acclaimed poets – who never had a romantic or sexual relationship – might sound like a very dry night at the theater. But in the hands of the brilliant playwright Sarah Ruhl and director Les Waters, Dear Elizabeth proves to be a moving, funny and highly theatrical experience.” “Brilliant,” agrees Broadway World. “She has given us a play that is exquisite poetry in itself. It’s amazingly sad yet funny, intense yet whimsical, deep yet obvious, revealing yet obscure – all at the same time.” “The play is wise and wistful,” observes the New Haven Review. “A wonderful evocation of friendship [which] dispels any doubt that poets in their prose can make for compelling, moving, and satisfying drama.”

The executive producers of Dear Elizabeth are Mary and Nicholas Graves, John and Helen Meyer, and Jean and Michael Strunsky. The Ira and Leonore Gershwin Philanthropic Fund serves as production sponsor, and the development of this play has been supported in part by the Mosse Artistic Development Fund. For the eighth straight year, BART and Wells Fargo serve as the official sponsors of Berkeley Rep’s season – and now the San Francisco Chronicle has signed on as a season sponsor as well. The season producers are Martha Ehmann Conte, Wayne Jordan and Quinn Delaney, Marjorie Randolph, Jack and Betty Schafer, and the Strauch Kulhanjian Family.

Sarah Ruhl has written numerous award-winning plays including Eurydice, which made its West Coast premiere at Berkeley Rep in 2005, and In the Next Room (or the vibrator play), which was commissioned by Berkeley Rep, premiered there in 2009, and earned a Tony nomination for Best Play on Broadway. Her adaptation of Three Sisters also played on the Thrust Stage in 2011. Ruhl’s other scripts include The Clean House, Dead Man’s Cell Phone, Demeter in the City, Late: a cowboy song, Melancholy Play, Orlando, Passion Play: a cycle, and Stage Kiss. She is the winner of a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship, as well as a Fourth Freedom Forum Award from the Kennedy Center, a Helen Hayes Award, the Helen Merrill Award, the PEN/Laura Pels Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, a Whiting Writers’ Award, and nominations for the NAACP Image Award and the Pulitzer Prize. Her plays have been performed at theatres across the country including Arena Stage, Classic Stage Company, Clubbed Thumb, Cornerstone Theater Company, Court Theatre, Epic Theater Ensemble, the Goodman Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, Madison Repertory Theatre, the Piven Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons, Second Stage Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Victory Gardens, the Wilma Theater, Woolly

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Mammoth Theatre Company, and Yale Repertory Theatre. These scripts have also been produced internationally and translated into Arabic, French, German, Korean, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish. Originally from Chicago, Ruhl received her MFA from Brown University, where she studied with celebrated playwright Paula Vogel. A member of New Dramatists and 13P, she lives in Brooklyn with her family.

Before becoming artistic director of the legendary Actors Theatre of Louisville in 2011, Obie Award-winner Les Waters served eight years as associate artistic director of Berkeley Rep. During that time, his shows garnered great acclaim, routinely ranking among the year’s best in publications such as The New Yorker, New York Times, Time Out New York, Time Magazine, and USA Today. He has a history of collaborating with prominent playwrights like Caryl Churchill, Charles Mee, and Wallace Shawn, and champions important new voices such as Will Eno, Jordan Harrison, Sarah Ruhl, and Anne Washburn. In 2009, he made his Broadway debut with Ruhl’s In the Next Room (or the vibrator play), which began in Berkeley. His other productions at Berkeley Rep include the world premieres of Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West, Fêtes de la Nuit, Finn in the Underworld, Girlfriend, and To the Lighthouse; the American premiere of TRAGEDY: a tragedy; the West Coast premieres of Ruhl’s Eurydice and Three Sisters; and extended runs of The Glass Menagerie, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Pillowman, Red, and Yellowman. Waters has numerous credits in New York, his native England, and at theatres across America. He led the MFA directing program at UC San Diego and is an associate artist of The Civilians.

Mary Beth Fisher (Elizabeth Bishop) performed in the world premiere of Dear Elizabeth at Yale Rep. In New York, she has appeared in Boy Gets Girl (Drama League honoree, Drama Desk and Lucile Lortel nominations), By The Sea..., and The Radical Mystique at Manhattan Theatre Club; Extremeties at Westside Arts Theatre; Frank’s Home at Playwrights Horizons; and The Night of the Iguana at Roundabout Theatre. Her Chicago credits include Angels in America, The Glass Menagerie, Three Tall Women, and The Year of Magical Thinking (Joseph Jefferson Award) at Court Theatre; The Clean House, Design for Living, Dinner with Friends, God of Carnage, Heartbreak House, Rock ‘n’ Roll, The Seagull, Spinning Into Butter, and others at the Goodman; Dead Man’s Cell Phone, The Dresser, and The Memory of Water at Steppenwolf; The Little Dog Laughed at AboutFace Theatre Company; and productions at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Northlight Theatre, Remy Bumppo, and Writer’s Theatre. She has worked at regional theatres...

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across the country including Center Stage, the Geffen Playhouse, the Guthrie Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, and South Coast Repertory. Her TV and film credits include Chicago Code, Chicago Fire, Dragonfly, NUMB3RS, Profiler, Trauma, and Without a Trace. In 20102, Fisher received Chicago's Leading Lady Award from the Sarah Siddons Society and was named Best Actress in Chicago Magazine. She was a Beinecke Fellow at Yale University and an inaugural Lunt-Fontanne Fellow.

Tom Nelis (Robert Lowell) has appeared on Broadway in Aida, The Caine Mutiny Court Martial, and Enron. Off Broadway, he has been seen at Manhattan Theatre Club, New York Theatre Workshop, The Public Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Signature Theatre Company, and Theatre for a New Audience. His previous Bay Area performances include Ahab in Laurie Anderson’s Moby Dick at Zellerbach Hall, Oscar Wilde in Gross Indecency at Theater on the Square, The Medium at Magic Theatre, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream at San Jose Repertory Theatre. Nelis has performed at international festivals throughout the world with Laurie Anderson, Richard Foreman, and SITI Company as well as with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Suzuki Company of Toga. He is a founding member of SITI, now celebrating its 20-year anniversary. Nelis earned an Obie Award for The Medium and a San Diego Critics Ensemble Award for Wintertime, as well as a Barrymore nomination for Candide and a Drama League nomination for Score. He received his MFA at UC San Diego.

Waters has assembled a trusted team of talented designers for this new production of the play. Annie Smart (scenic design) devised sets or costumes for 15 previous shows at Berkeley Rep. She also worked on the Broadway production of In the Next Room, the off-Broadway production of Taking Over, and the London production of Tiny Kushner. Maria Hooper (costume design) created costumes for the world premiere of Dear Elizabeth at Yale Rep. Her other credits include the television series NickMom Night Out and the feature film Don’t Ask Don’t Tell. Russell Champa (lighting design) collaborated with Waters on Eurydice, In the Next Room, and The Pillowman. In addition to his extensive experience at off-Broadway and regional theatres, he designed the Broadway productions of God Said, “Hal!” and In the Next Room. Bray Poor (sound designer) worked on Berkeley Rep’s productions of Eurydice, Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West, In the Next Room, and Red. His many other credits, on Broadway and off, include the recent revival of Look Back in Anger at the Roundabout Theatre. Hannah Wasileski (projections) has designed for the Yale Cabaret, Yale School of Drama, and Yale Rep, including (MORE)
the premiere of *Dear Elizabeth*. She has exhibited in London and Glasgow, and also worked on *My Life in a Nutshell*, *Sonnambula*, and *The Strange Tales of Liaozhai* at HERE Arts Center. The stage manager for this production is **Cynthia Cahill**.

*Dear Elizabeth* welcomes theatre lovers with a series of **special events**:

- **Celebrate Memorial Day weekend with low-cost previews** on Friday, May 24; Saturday, May 25; Sunday, May 26; and Tuesday, May 28.

- **Teen Night** begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, May 24 and includes dinner, a presentation by a member of the artistic team, and a performance of the show. Tickets are only $10 for high-school students. For details, call (510) 647-2973 or e-mail teencouncil@berkeleyrep.org.

- **Opening-night festivities** are held on Wednesday, May 29 with a pre-show dinner for donors at the Hotel Shattuck Plaza and a post-show party for the audience in the Roda Theatre.

- **Post-show discussions** moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM performances on Thursday, June 13; Tuesday, June 18; and Friday, June 28. Post-show discussions with Berkeley Rep’s docents take place after all matinees.

- **Free 30-minute docent talks** begin at 7:00 PM every Tuesday and Thursday evening. Docent talks are also held in four local communities: at the Lafayette Library on Wednesday, May 29 at 7:00 PM; at the Orinda Library on Tuesday, June 4 at 7:00 PM; at the Moraga Library on Wednesday, June 5 at 2:00 PM; and at the Kensington Library on Monday, June 10 at 7:00 PM.

- And, on select evenings, patrons can whet their palates for the play with **free tastings** from Semifreddi’s starting at 6:00 PM on Sunday, June 2 and Sunday, July 7.

**Individual tickets to *Dear Elizabeth* start at only $29.** Additional savings are available for groups, seniors, students, and anyone under 30 years of age – meaning **discounted tickets** can be obtained for as little as $14.50. The Roda Theatre is located at 2015 Addison Street, near bus lines, bike routes, and parking lots – and only half a block from BART. For tickets or information, call (510) 647-2949 or simply click [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org).
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 more than 300 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. Come see tomorrow’s plays today at Berkeley Rep.

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DEAR ELIZABETH
FACT SHEET

WHO: Written by Sarah Ruhl
A play in letters from Elizabeth Bishop to Robert Lowell and back again
Directed by Les Waters
Designed by Annie Smart (sets), Maria Hooper (costumes), Russell Champa (lighting), Bray Poor (sound), and Hannah Wasileski (projections)
Starring Mary Beth Fisher and Tom Nelis

WHAT: Dear Elizabeth – The West Coast premiere of a new tale of love and longing from the creators of Eurydice, Three Sisters, and In the Next Room (or the vibrator play).

WHERE: Berkeley Repertory Theatre
Roda Theatre, 2015 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Berkeley, CA 94704

WHEN: May 24 – July 7, 2013
- Tuesdays @ 8:00 PM
- Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM
- Thursdays and Fridays @ 8:00 PM
- Saturdays @ 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM
- Sundays @ 2:00 PM and 7:00 PM

Special Events:
Teen night: Friday 5/24 @ 6:30 PM
Low-cost previews: Friday 5/24, Saturday 5/25 & Tuesday 5/28 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 5/26 @ 7:00 PM
Opening night: Wednesday 5/29 @ 8:00 PM
Tastings: Sundays 6/2 & 7/7 @ 6:00 PM (Semifreddi’s)
Post-show discussions: Thursday 6/13, Tuesday 6/18, and Friday 6/28 @ 8:00 PM
Docents: talks on Tuesdays and Thursdays @ 7:00 PM; discussions after all matinees

HOW MUCH: $29 - $77 (subject to change)
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


TIX & INFO: (510) 647-2949 – berkeleyrep.org