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BERKELEY REP'S GROUND FLOOR AWARDS RESIDENCIES TO 27 AWESOME ARTISTS

New R&D facility for theatre picks 18 innovative projects for second sizzling summer lab

MARCH 18, 2013 – This June, as part of an extraordinary new laboratory for collaboration, some of the nation's most prominent and promising writers, directors, and composers converge on Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Today, the renowned nonprofit announced 18 selections for the second sizzling summer lab at The Ground Floor, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work. During an intense four-week period, dozens of artists will live, dine, create, and collaborate at the Theatre's new campus in West Berkeley.

From hundreds of applications, 18 projects featuring 27 innovative artists have been chosen. Residencies of a week or more have been awarded to **Lucy Alibar** (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*); **Janet Allard** and **Nikos Tsakalacos** (*Driving West* and *Pool Boy*); **Todd Almond** (*Girlfriend*) and **Lisa Peterson** (*An Iliad*); **César Alvarez** (*Futurity*); **Jeff Augustin** (*Cry Old Kingdom*); **Hannah Bos**, **Oliver Butler**, and **Paul Thureen** of the **Debate Society** (*Blood Play* and *Buddy Cop 2*); **Sarah Burgess** (*Earthsiege: Commence*); **Jackie Sibblies Drury** (*We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...*); **Larissa FastHorse** (*Cherokee Family Reunion*); **Idris Goodwin** (*How We Got On*) and **Adam Mansbach** (*Go the Fuck to Sleep*); **Lauren Gunderson** (*Exit Pursued by a Bear*); **David Hanbury** (*Mrs. Smith Live at the Bowl*) and **Andrew Rasmussen** (*When a Man Loves a Diva*); **Kristen Kosmas** (*Hello Failure*), **Gregory S. Moss** (*Punkplay*), and **Paul Willis** (*Lascivious Something*) of **Rihanna**; **Victor Lesniewski** (*Where Bison Run*); **Mona Mansour** (*The Hour of Feeling*) and **Tala Manassah** (*The Letter*); **A. Rey Pamatmat** (*Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them*); **Nicholas C. Pappas** (*The Ballad of 423 and 424*); and **Heidi Schreck** (*Creature*).

Joining them to work on projects at The Ground Floor are respected directors such as **Sarah Benson** (*Blasted*), **Kip Fagan** (*The Revisionist*), and **Maureen Towey** (*Finding Penelope*), as well as numerous local and out-of-town actors. The Ground Floor is made possible by a \$1 million grant from the James Irvine Foundation's Artistic Innovation Fund with additional support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Kenneth Rainin Foundation.

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RECIPIENT OF THE TONY AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING REGIONAL THEATRE

The Ground Floor, Berkeley Rep's Center for the Creation and Development of New Work, is a bold new initiative designed to raise the bar on the Tony Award-winning nonprofit's already successful record of artistic innovation. Think of it as **an incubator for theatrical start-ups or a top-notch R&D facility for artists**. The Ground Floor promotes cross-pollination among artists and champions the spirit of innovation inherent to Berkeley and the Bay Area. Two shows developed through the program have already made their way into Berkeley Rep's season: Dan LeFranc's *Troublemaker, or the Freakin Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright* had its world premiere in January, and Marcus Gardley's *The House That Will Not Stand* will debut in 2014.

The Ground Floor became possible when Berkeley Rep united all its preproduction activities – its costume shop, prop shop, scene shop, and offices – at a spacious campus in West Berkeley. The Theatre is transforming a vacant warehouse on that site into **a vibrant new creative center** that will ultimately include rehearsal halls, intimate studios, and even housing for visiting artists. The result will be a dynamic home for play creation – an organic and energetic environment for artists where they can live, develop work in a flexible setting, challenge each other to expand the boundaries of theatre, and intersect with the public to create community. The leaders of this effort are **Madeleine Oldham**, Berkeley Rep's resident dramaturg and director of The Ground Floor, and **Karena Fiorenza Ingersoll**, Berkeley Rep's associate managing director and manager of The Ground Floor.

"For decades, Berkeley Rep has developed new work and nurtured innovative projects," says Oldham. "Last year, **we launched The Ground Floor to devote even more time, space, and resources to creating plays and daring ourselves to create them in new ways**. Our inaugural summer lab was wildly successful. With so many talented artists all working under one roof, it felt like the entire building was vibrating for four weeks.

"So we're thrilled to announce another session and this terrific selection of artists," she continues. "The projects we're supporting this year are enormously diverse – from a comedy about a shark to a drama about the Syrian civil war, from a musical set in Alaska to a children's show on Mars, from a vaudeville act about obesity issues to an interactive experience with electronic music. Our vision is coming true: artists from across the nation are gathering here to enjoy the atmosphere that gave birth to Berkeley Rep and to take advantage of the **creative, collaborative, forward-thinking, and risk-taking** culture that is the hallmark of life in the Bay Area. I can't wait until June!"

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Get in on The Ground Floor. Here is an alphabetical list of the artists and projects selected for the second annual summer lab:

Lucy Alibar: *Carl the Raping Goat Saves Christmas*

Lucy Alibar recently gained international attention when *Beasts of the Southern Wild* earned the Cannes Film Festival Camera D'Or, the Nantucket Film Festival New Voices in Screenwriting Award, the Sundance Grand Jury Prize, and four Oscar nominations. Along with director Benh Zeitlin, Alibar adapted *Beasts* from her play *Juicy and Delicious*. Her other plays include *Christmas and Jubilee Behold the Meteor Shower*, *Lightning/Picnic*, *Mommy Says I'm Pretty on the Insides*, and *Valentine's Day*. Now she comes to Berkeley Rep to work on a new script: *Carl the Raping Goat Saves Christmas* is a series of stories about pro-bono criminal defense law, Vacation Bible School... and goats.

Janet Allard & Nikos Tsakalacos: *Alexander Supertramp*

The team behind *Driving West* and *Pool Boy* reunite at Berkeley Rep to begin development of a new musical. In 1992, the body of Christopher McCandless was found in an abandoned school bus in the Denali Wilderness. As revealed in Jon Krakauer's best-seller *Into the Wild*, McCandless was a young man from a well-to-do family who rejected his conventional upbringing and set out on an ill-fated odyssey across the country. *Alexander Supertramp*, a new show from playwright Janet Allard and songwriter Nikos Tsakalkos, draws on Christopher's journals and follows his journey to Alaska.

Todd Almond & Lisa Peterson: *The Idea of Order*

Lisa Peterson earned Obie Awards for *An Iliad* and *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Todd Almond attracted a following with musicals like *Girlfriend*, *Melancholy Play*, and *On the Levee*. Now they team up for a new piece that draws on the poetry of Wallace Stevens and the music of Charles Ives, iconic artists who lived double lives. By day, both men worked as insurance executives in Connecticut; by night, each of them led America into uncharted artistic territory. Inspired by images and ideas in their artwork, *The Idea of Order* explores the purpose of poetry in contemporary life.

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César Alvarez: *The Universe is a Small Hat*

Vocalist, lyricist, and guitarist for the Lisps, César Alvarez is also known for the musical *Futurity* and compositions for shows like *Good Person of Szechwan* and *3 2's; or AFAR*. Now he channels his interest in electronic music into an immersive theatre experience which tells the story of space colonists leaving Earth under the guidance of a charismatic spiritual leader. Designed as a multisensory experience that merges dramatic narrative with the participatory feeling of a game, *The Universe is a Small Hat* deals with questions of quantum physics, cosmology, immortality through technology, and the uncertain nature of our universe. Obie Award-winning director **Sarah Benson** joins Alvarez at Berkeley Rep to collaborate on this project.

Jeff Augustin: *Krik? Krak! or The Last Tiger in Haiti*

Winner of the 2011 Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award, Jeff Augustin is the author of *Cry Old Kingdom* and *The Imaginary Life of Millo St. Jean*. His latest play draws on the Haitian tradition of Krik? Krak! to explore the fragile boundaries of storytellers and their stories. As children, Chloe, Joseph, and Paul coped with their troubled lives by secretly gathering to share folktales. When they reconvene a decade later, the trio gets caught in a conflict as twisted and dark as any of the tales they've told. At The Ground Floor, Augustin partners with director **Maureen Towey**, a visiting artist at Berkeley Rep known for her work with Arcade Fire and Sojourn Theatre.

Sarah Burgess: *Camdenside*

Playwright Sarah Burgess penned *Earthsiege: Commence* and *FAIL: Failures*. She also writes for *Naked Radio*, the monthly podcast from Naked Angels. Now she gets in on The Ground Floor with *Camdenside*, a new comedy about a great white shark named Doug. After his wife is killed in a boating accident, Doug drives around Florida in a motorized wheelchair on a furious hunt for revenge. When he takes shelter in the basement of an apartment building, Doug disrupts the lives of the humans who reside upstairs – and his loneliness becomes more than he can bear.

The Debate Society: *Untitled ski play*

Best known for *Blood Play* and *Buddy Cop 2*, the Debate Society is an Obie Award-winning company that creates new plays through the collaboration of **Hannah Bos**, **Oliver Butler**, and **Paul Thureen**. The trio comes to The Ground Floor to transform the source material for their new

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project into a working draft of the script. The Debate Society's eighth full-length play takes place in the seventh-best ski resort in southwest central Colorado. The lifestyles of the rich and famous intersect the habits of the aimless and itinerant in a play about class, competition, and cold weather.

Jackie Sibblies Drury: *The Theory of Rational Choice*

Jackie Sibblies Drury wrote *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as Southwest Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915*, which premiered at Victory Gardens and played off Broadway at Soho Rep. The Ground Floor hosts Drury for revisions of her latest script, *The Theory of Rational Choice*, a YouTube period-piece about value – of girls, of women, of sex – on the internet.

Larissa FastHorse: *What Would Crazy Horse Do?*

A playwright and choreographer from the Sicangu Lakota Nation, Larissa FastHorse is the author of *Average Family*, *Cherokee Family Reunion*, *Fancy Dancer*, *Hunka*, and *Teaching Disco Square Dancing To Our Elders: A Class Presentation*. FastHorse set out to write *What Would Crazy Horse Do?* after learning that Native Americans danced at a powwow in 1926 in honor of Dr. Hiram Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. In this new play, descendants of the people at that event – Native Americans facing the extinction of their tribe and a new generation of KKK leaders – struggle with similar questions: when is race separation a form of racism, and when is it essential preservation?

Idris Goodwin & Adam Mansbach: *Rage is Back*

These Are the Breaks, the debut collection of essays by Idris Goodwin, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize – and his plays include *How We Got On*, which premiered at last year's Humana Festival of New Plays. Now he's coming to The Ground Floor to create a stage adaptation of a new book by Berkeley writer Adam Mansbach. Mansbach published the international bestseller *Go the Fuck to Sleep*, the cult classic *Angry Black White Boy*, and *The End of the Jews*, a novel which won the California Book Award. His new book, *Rage is Back*, is an homage to New York's golden era of graffiti – and the pair plan to turn this vivid love letter to street artists into an equally vibrant play.

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Lauren Gunderson: *The Heath*

An award-winning playwright based in San Francisco, Lauren Gunderson's credits include *Émilie: La Marquise du Châtelet Defends Her Life Tonight*, *Exit Pursued by a Bear*, *Silent Sky*, and *Toil and Trouble*. Known for exploring the intersection of science and theatre, Gunderson examines the neuroscience of aging in a new play that mixes Shakespeare's King Lear with her own grandfather's battle against dementia. *The Heath* is a musical and visual narrative which melds fact and fiction to explore madness, memory, and lineage.

David Hanbury & Andrew Rasmussen:

Mrs. Smith & Carlyle: To Mars and Back Again

Mrs. Smith, a character created and performed by David Hanbury, has been described as a cross between Dame Edna and Pee-wee Herman. She's even appeared on *America's Got Talent*. Now she comes to Berkeley Rep with her trusty director, Andrew Rasmussen, to work on the book for a new rock musical – a comedic, science-fiction adventure for children (and hip adults). When her beloved cat turns his litter box into a rocket and blasts off for the red planet, Mrs. Smith gets a whirlwind lesson in science, the solar system, and the true meaning of friendship. The Ground Floor welcomes Hanbury, Rasmussen, and their latest work in progress, *Mrs. Smith & Carlyle: To Mars and Back Again*.

Victor Lesniewski: Untitled play about the Syrian Civil War

Past scripts by Victor Lesniewski include *Cloven Tongues*, *Couriers and Contrabands*, and *Where Bison Run*. At The Ground Floor, he workshops his new play about the civil war in Syria with a team of local actors. Exploring the conflict from many angles, Lesniewski considers the role of religion in the division of sides, the disenfranchised in rural areas, the *mukhabarat* (or police state) and its torture and detention of protesters, and the competing influences of outside parties such as the West, Iran, and Hezbollah.

Mona Mansour & Tala Manassah: *The Wife*

Playwright Mona Mansour is the author of *The Hour of Feeling*, *Urge for Going*, and *The Way West* as well as three short plays co-written with Tala Manassah of the Morningside Center for Teaching and Social Responsibility: *After*, *The House*, and *The Letter*. Their new show is a cabaret act starring the wife of a dictator in the Middle East. This Western-educated beauty sings

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in Arabic and English and regales her audience with stories and jokes... as the regime unravels around her. Set amid the Arab Spring, *The Wife* examines how power accrues, how evil can become ordinary, and how the public face of an oppressive regime may have more in common with First Ladies around the world than we'd like to think.

Rihanna: *Charm City*

Kristen Kosmas and **Gregory S. Moss** are playwrights and performers – and therefore archenemies and bitter rivals. With the help of director **Paul Willis**, they try to destroy each other once and for all with their formidable yet disputable knowledge of (a) the controversial film *The Last Tango in Paris* and (b) the mysterious monument called Mount Rushmore. A live investigation into arbitrary antagonism and the idea of defining yourself in opposition to others, *Charm City* explores pornography, geography, and the destruction of careers, in the interest of reinvesting the debased language of public and artistic discourse with a more playful, engaging, and entertaining option.

A. Rey Pamatmat:

Untitled project about the abuse of power and magical narratives

A. Rey Pamatmat's play *Edith Can Shoot Things and Hit Them* premiered at the Humana Festival and received the Steinberg New Play Citation from the American Theatre Critics Association. His untitled project explores abuses of power and magical metaphors. Whether they feature werewolves, witches, superheroes, vampires, or adolescents with wands, there is a resurgence of narratives in which everyday people suddenly find themselves endowed with supernatural powers. Yet society simultaneously struggles with the awareness that people who have actual power often exploit their gifts to exert force, obstruct progress, or evoke terror. Pamatmat's new play unpacks what happens in a world where we can get whatever we wish for and often (with unfortunate consequences) more.

Nicholas C. Pappas: Untitled Fatty Arbuckle project

Nicholas C. Pappas won the 2012 Heideman Award for his 10-minute play *The Ballad of 423 and 424*. His next script dips into vaudeville to depict a man who plays Santa at the mall and then loses it all in a scandal. Through hilarious hallucinations, he seeks consolation from Fatty Arbuckle, the silent-film star whose career was also destroyed by bizarre accusations associated

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with his weight. Amidst the silliness, Pappas asks serious questions about society's obsession with appearances and investigates how inaction can make us complicit in our own demise.

Heidi Schreck: Untitled soup-kitchen play

Obie Award-winner Heidi Schreck performed at Berkeley Rep in the world premiere of *In the Wake*. As a writer, her credits include *Creature* and *There Are No More Big Secrets*. She comes to the summer lab to work on a nascent script set in a soup kitchen. She is joined at The Ground Floor by director **Kip Fagan**, known locally for Marin Theatre Company's production of *Circle Mirror Transformation* and nationally for the off-Broadway premiere of *The Revisionists*.

The Ground Floor aims to create a truly safe space for artists that is not influenced by the pressure of imminent public exposure, so – unlike many other labs – it does not require recipients to present a reading or performance at the end of their residencies. Nonetheless, some projects may reach a stage where the creators request an invited audience or even engage community members as collaborators. **For more information** on each project, and for future announcements of opportunities to interact, watch the website at berkeleyrep.org/groundfloor.

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 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 – the 600-seat Roda Theatre, the 400-seat Thrust Stage, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, the Osher Studio, and a spacious new campus in West Berkeley – are helping revitalize a renowned city. See tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep.

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