FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE PIANIST OF WILLESDEN LANE BRINGS POWERFUL TALE OF SURVIVAL TO BERKELEY REP

Piano virtuoso Mona Golabek stars in one-woman play directed by acclaimed performer Hershey Felder

September 26, 2013 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre proudly announces The Pianist of Willesden Lane, a one-woman play starring internationally acclaimed pianist and storyteller Mona Golabek. Based on the book The Children of Willesden Lane by Golabek and Lee Cohen, the play is set in Vienna in 1938 and in London during the Blitzkrieg and tells the true story of Golabek’s mother, Lisa Jura, a young Jewish musician whose dreams are interrupted by the Nazi regime. In this poignant show, Golabek performs some of the world’s most beautiful music live as she relates the real-life legacy of her mother’s quest to survive.

Acclaimed performer Hershey Felder returns to Berkeley Rep, but this time behind the scenes as adapter and director of this spellbinding theatrical event. Felder recently starred in Berkeley Rep’s run of George Gershwin Alone. Now he brings audiences a riveting tale of hope that is a powerful testament to how music helps us survive through our darkest times. The Pianist of Willesden Lane begins previews on October 25, opens October 30, and runs through December 8, 2013 on the intimate Thrust Stage.

“We welcome Hershey Felder back as the director of The Pianist of Willesden Lane,” remarks Artistic Director Tony Taccone. “Mona and Hershey have found a unique way of telling the story of Lisa Jura’s escape from Nazi Vienna. Using exceptional and transformative music to highlight the narrative, Ms. Golabek captures her mother’s story in a way that is both surprising and moving. It’s an honor to have her perform at Berkeley Rep.”

“This beautiful tale told by Mona herself is performed in the style of musical storytelling that Berkeley audiences saw from me earlier this year,” said Director Hershey Felder. “Working with her to present this piece has been an incredible joy both because her skill as a musician showcases some of the most beautiful and enduring piano music ever composed, and because no one else could tell this story the way she can.”

The Pianist of Willesden Lane has enthralled critics since its debut at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles. “This elegant heartfelt show is an arresting, deeply affecting triumph,” asserts The Los Angeles Times. “It’s all about Golabek, whose selfless desire to recount her mother’s remarkable tale of survival is enthralling, just as her gifts at the piano are self-evident.

(MORE)
“An exceptionally heartfelt daughter-to-mother tribute,” hails the Boston Globe. “Felder’s script and Golabek’s performance blend into a portrait of a remarkable young woman whose combination of self-possession, romantic idealism, and dogged resilience kept her afloat when others might well have foundered.” The Chicago Tribune proclaims that The Pianist of Willesden Lane is, “a stirring case of art preserving life....

American concert pianist Mona Golabek has appeared at the Hollywood Bowl, the Kennedy Center, and Royal Festival Hall. She is a Grammy nominee who has been the subject of several documentaries, including Concerto for Mona with conductor Zubin Mehta. Her syndicated radio program, The Romantic Hours, combines music with poetry. Her recordings include Carnival of the Animals and Ravel’s Mother Goose Suite featuring Meryl Streep, both recorded with Golabek’s sister, Renee Golabek-Kaye. Both daughters were taught by their mother, Lisa Jura, who is the subject of Golabek’s acclaimed book, The Children of Willesden Lane. Golabek founded Hold On To Your Music, a foundation devoted to spreading the message of the power of music. With the help of the Milken Family Foundation, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Annenberg Foundation, she created educational resources, which, with her book, have been adopted into school curricula across America.

Director and adapter Hershey Felder created and performed George Gershwin Alone, which played at Berkeley Rep, on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre, at West End’s Duchess Theatre, and through a worldwide live broadcast. He also performed his Composers Sonata 1999-2013 – George Gershwin Alone; Monsieur Chopin; Beethoven, As I Knew Him; Maestro: Leonard Bernstein; and Hershey Felder as Franz Liszt in Rock Star at dozens of theatres across the U.S. and around the world, including a command performance of Monsieur Chopin for the Polish Ambassador to the United States. Felder is the winner of the 2007 Los Angeles Ovation Awards for Best Musical and Best Actor for George Gershwin Alone. His compositions include Aliyah, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra; Fairytale, a Musical; Les Anges de Paris, Suite for Violin and Piano; Song Settings; Saltimbanques for Piano and Orchestra; Etudes Thematiques for Piano; and An American Story for Actor and Orchestra. As director, he premiered The Pianist of Willesden Lane at the Geffen Playhouse in April 2012. He will perform his world premiere of Abe Lincoln’s Piano at the Geffen in January. Felder has been a scholar in residence at Harvard University’s Department of Music and is married to Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada.

Five talented designers will help bring The Pianist of Willesden Lane to the intimate Thrust Stage. Trevor Hay and Hershey Felder (scenic designers), Jaclyn Maduff (costume designer), Christopher Rynne (lighting designer), Erik Carstensen (sound designer), and Andrew Wilder and Greg Sowizdrzal (projection designers). Kimberly Mark Webb is the production stage manager.

The producer of The Pianist of Willesden Lane is Eighty-Eight Entertainment. Created in 2001 by Hershey Felder, Eighty-Eight Entertainment is devoted to the creation of new works of musical theatre. Current projects include the new musicals Abe Lincoln’s Piano and Hershey Felder as Franz Liszt in Rock Star. Its recordings include Love Songs of the Yiddish Theatre; Back from Broadway; George Gershwin Alone; Monsieur Chopin; Beethoven, As I Knew Him; and An American Story for Actor and Orchestra.
During the run of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* audiences can enjoy many special events:

- **Low-cost previews** take place at 8:00 PM on Friday, October 25; Saturday, October 26; and Tuesday, October 29 and at 7:00 PM on Sunday, October 27.
- **Opening Night festivities** are held on Wednesday, October 30 at 8:00 PM with a pre-show dinner for donors held at the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life, catered by Hugh Groman Catering, and a post-show party for audiences.
- **Teen Night** begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, November 1 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.
- **Repartee includes free 30-minute docent presentations** one hour before Tuesday and Thursday evening performances and free discussions after all matinees.
- **Post-play discussions** moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, November 14; Tuesday, November 19; and Friday, December 6. Post-show discussions with Berkeley Rep’s docents take place after all weekend matinees.

This season Berkeley Rep will partner with the Theatre Development Fund to offer open-captioned performances viewable from at least 25 seats. This state-of-the-art technology will make performances accessible to patrons with hearing loss. An open-captioned performance for *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* will take place Sunday, December 8, 2013 at 2:00 pm.

The 2013-14 season is supported by BART and Wells Fargo, who have generously renewed their commitment as Berkeley Rep’s official season sponsors. Berkeley Rep is also proud to have the *San Francisco Chronicle/SFGate* as a second-year season sponsor and the Strauch Kulhanjian Family as season producer. *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* is also made possible by lead producers Jack and Betty Schafer, executive producers Shirley D. and Philip D. Schild, Michael and Sue Steinberg, and Jean and Michael Strunsky. The production sponsors are Ira and Leonore Gershwin Philanthropic Fund and the Koret Foundation.

Individual tickets to *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* start at $29. Additional savings are available for season subscribers, groups, seniors, students, and anyone under 30 years of age – meaning discounted tickets can be obtained for as little as $14.50. For details, call (510) 647-2949 – or simply click [berkeleyrep.org](http://berkeleyrep.org).

**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. **Come see tomorrow’s plays today at Berkeley Rep.** Subscriptions are now on sale for the upcoming season, and individual tickets go on sale soon.

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FACT SHEET

The Pianist of Willesden Lane

WHO:
Based on the book *The Children of Willesden Lane*
By Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen

Directed and adapted by Hershey Felder
Starring Mona Golabek as Lisa Jura

Creative team: Trevor Hay and Hershey Felder (scenic designers), Jaclyn Maduff (costume designer), Christopher Rynne (lighting designer), Erik Carstensen (sound designer), Andrew Wilder and Greg Sowizdrzal (projection designers).

WHAT:
In *Pianist of Willesden Lane*, Mona Golabek performs some of the world’s most beautiful music, live—as she relates the real-life legacy of her mother’s quest to survive the Nazi regime. “Unforgettable,” lauds the *LA Times*.

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

WHEN:
October 25-December 8, 2013 (Student matinee on 12/10)

- Tuesdays @ 8:00 PM
- Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM
- Thursdays @ 8:00 PM-with bonus matinees at 2:00 PM on 11/7 and 12/5
- Fridays @ 8:00 PM
- Saturdays @ 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM-no matinee on 11/19
- Sundays @ 2:00 PM and 7:00 PM-no matinee on 10/27
- No performance on 11/28

Special Events:

Low-cost previews: Friday, 10/25, Saturday 10/26 & Tuesday 10/29 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 10/27 @ 7:00 PM

Opening night: Wednesday, 10/30 @ 8:00 PM

Teen Night: Friday, 11/1 @ 6:30 PM

Repartee: FREE docent talks @ 7:00 PM on Tuesday and Thursdays and free discussions after all weekend matinees

Post-play discussions: Thursday 11/14, Tuesday 11/19, and Friday 12/6 following the performance and after all weekend matinees

COST: $29 - $89 (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 15 or more, contact (510) 647-2918 or groups@berkeleyrep.org


TIX & INFO: (510) 647-2949 – [berkeleyrep.org](http://www.berkeleyrep.org)

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