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TONY AWARD-WINNING COMEDY VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE COMES TO BERKELEY REP

Christopher Durang’s Broadway sensation to be staged by Richard E.T. White

August 20, 2013 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre kicks off its 46th season this September with Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, winner of the 2013 Tony Award for Best Play. The hilarious Broadway blockbuster from three-time Obie Award-winner Christopher Durang begins previews in the Roda Theatre on September 20, opens September 25, and runs through October 20. Durang, the renowned author of rollicking comedies such as Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You and The Marriage of Bette & Boo, turns Chekhov on his head with this witty and incisive farce. In bucolic Bucks County, Vanya and Sonia fritter their lives away in their family’s farmhouse amid regret, angst, and the alarming prophecies of an addled housecleaner. Enter their sister Masha, a self-absorbed movie star with her prized boy toy Spike, and the stage is set for an absurd weekend of hilarity and global warming.

Acclaimed director Richard E.T. White returns to Berkeley Rep to stage the laugh-inducing Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, a loving homage to Chekhov’s themes of heartbreak and hope.

“Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike will be a wild and fun ride,” remarks Artistic Director Tony Taccone. “Famous comic raconteur Christopher Durang delivers a play that isn’t only extremely funny, but one that has a deep and bittersweet undercurrent that taps into the zeitgeist. To stage this play we’re welcoming back Richard E.T White, who has successfully directed 11 productions at Berkeley Rep, starting with Otherwise Engaged in 1984 through Dancing at Lughnasa in 1993. He has a particular understanding of absurdity and of comic language and American culture that will serve this play well. I’m always looking for a way to start the season with a show that celebrates life and this is one I know audiences will love.”

“Durang’s play is a wonderful creative challenge: it’s a mash up of themes, characters, and images from Chekhov and Walt Disney, filtered through his delightful and acerbic wit,” says White. “As funny and charming as Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike is, it’s also a subversively moving exploration of love and family, of second chances, and of first chances that come upon you unexpectedly, late in life. Thoreau could have been writing about these people when he wrote: ‘Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.’ The gift that Durang gives his characters, and the audience, is that he allows the song to come out.”

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The critically lauded play has swept critics off their feet. “*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is brainy and witty and clever and cute,” raves *Variety*. “In this hilarious mash up, classic themes of existential loss and longing are given both a modern spin and endlessly inventive comic twists.”

“Deliriously funny,” declares the *New York Times*. “The theater erupts in booming gusts of laughter… I can imagine many satisfied patrons leaving the theater muttering, ‘Now if only real Chekhov plays were this funny maybe I wouldn’t keep falling asleep.’”

“Hilarious,” hails the *Hollywood Reporter*. “This is a work by a mature playwright taking stock and illuminating countless universal truths… He also demonstrates the enduring currency of Chekhov’s themes, showing that for all our supposed progress in the era of mass connectivity, despair and disappointment are as present as ever.”

Christopher Durang’s work has appeared on Broadway, off Broadway, across America, and around the world. His many plays include *The Actor’s Nightmare, Baby with the Bathwater*, Betty’s Summer Vacation (Obie Award), Beyond Therapy, For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls, Laughing Wild, The Marriage of Bette and Boo (Obie Award), Media Amok, Miss Witherspoon (Pulitzer Prize finalist), Mrs. Bob Cratchit’s Wild Christmas Binge, Sex and Longing, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You (Obie Award), and Why Torture is Wrong and the People Who Love Them. Durang earned a Tony nomination for Best Book of a Musical with A History of the American Film and also wrote the book for Adrift in Macao. He co-wrote The Idiots Karamazov with Albert Innaurato, and co-wrote and performed the cabaret Das Lusitania Songspiel with Sigourney Weaver. Durang has been co-chair of the playwriting program at the Juilliard School since 1994. He was recently inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame, and his other honors include the Dramatists Guild Hull Warriner Award, the Harvard Arts Medal, and the PEN/Laura Pels Award for a Master American Dramatist. Beyond Therapy made its West Coast premiere at Berkeley Rep in 1983.

Richard E.T. White directed 11 shows at Berkeley Rep between 1984 and 1993, including Blue Window, Dancing at Lughnasa, Hard Times (West Coast premiere), The Importance of Being Earnest, In the Belly of the Beast, Painting It Red (West Coast premiere), Reckless, The Sea, and Tooth of Crime (with Sharon Ott). He served as the Rep’s resident director from 1985 to 1987. In 1987, his production of Hard Times was selected for the American Theatre Exchange in Manhattan, becoming the first show in Berkeley Rep’s history to transfer to New York. White served as artistic director of San Francisco’s Eureka Theatre and Chicago’s Wisdom Bridge Theatre. He has also worked with Alliance Theatre Company, American Conservatory Theater, California Shakespeare Theater, Court Theatre, the Empty Space Theatre, Intiman Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Northlight Theatre, The Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the Shakespeare Theatre Company. With Paul Dresher and Rinde Eckert, he co-created the electronic opera Slow Fire, which toured internationally and appeared at Lincoln Center. His recent work includes Red at Seattle Repertory Theatre and the Arizona Theatre Company, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Lion in Winter at Shakespeare Santa Cruz. White has been chair of the theatre department at Cornish College of the Arts since 1995 when he returned from a three-year residency in Japan, which included teaching at Toin and Gakushuin Universities and serving as resident director for Theatre Company Subaru in Tokyo.

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Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike is brought to life by an ensemble featuring six of the Bay Area’s most accomplished comic actors and gifted newcomers:

- **Anthony Fusco** (Vanya) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. A leading actor and company member at American Conservatory Theater (ACT) and California Shakespeare Theater, his credits include *Clybourne Park*, Samuel Beckett’s *Play*, *Dead Metaphor*, David Mamet’s *Race* and *November*, *The Homecoming*, *Hedda Gabler* (directed by Richard E.T. White), *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *The Three Sisters* at ACT; and *King Lear*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Tempest*, *Arms and the Man*, and *Candida* at California Shakespeare Theater. On Broadway, Fusco has appeared in *The Real Thing* and *The Real Inspector Hound*.

- **Lorri Holt** (Masha) is an award-winning Bay Area actress who has performed in several Berkeley Rep productions, including *Finn in the Underworld*, *Fêtes de la Nuit*, *Dinner with Friends*, *Tooth of Crime*, *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Blue Window*, and *Reckless* (these last three directed by Richard E.T. White). Holt has worked with SF Playhouse, American Conservatory Theater, Magic Theatre, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Aurora Theatre Company, Marin Theatre Company, Center Repertory Company, TheatreWorks, and in many long-running San Francisco commercial productions, including *The Vagina Monologues* and Christopher Durang’s play, *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, with Cloris Leachman.

- **Mark Junek** (Spike) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. His credits include *The Performers* on Broadway, *Galileo* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Classic Stage Company), *The Imaginary Invalid* (Bard SummerScape), and *The Seagull* and *Henry V* (Juilliard). He has appeared in the TV shows *Smash* and *Law & Order: SVU*.

- **Caroline Kaplan** (Nina) makes her Berkeley Rep debut. Her New York credits include *The Silver Cord* (Peccadillo Theater Company), *The Threepenny Opera* (Riverside Theater), *The Completely Fictional—Utterly True—Final Strange Tale of Edgar Allen Poe* (Center Stage in Baltimore), *The Merchant of Venice* (Trinity Repertory Company), *Going Live* (Guthrie Theater), and *The Three Sisters* (Williamstown Theatre Festival).

- **Sharon Lockwood** (Sonia) was last seen at Berkeley Rep as a 200-year-old woman in *Culture Clash’s Zorro in Hell*. Her other Berkeley Rep credits include *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *The Triumph of Love*, *Pentecost*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *The Magic Fire*. Lockwood has recently performed in *Dead Metaphor* at American Conservatory Theater, and originated the role of Barbara in the world premiere of *Nickel and Dimed* (Intiman Theatre, Mark Taper Forum, and TheatreWorks/Brava for Women in the Arts) under the direction of Bartlett Sher.

- **Heather Alicia Simms** (Cassandra) also makes her debut at Berkeley Rep. An actor, voiceover artist, and writer, she has appeared on television, in film, and on stage in New York, London, and regional theatres around the country. Her Broadway credits include *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Gem of the Ocean*. Simms most recently appeared in Spike Lee’s *Red Hook Summer*.

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The creative team for **Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike** includes longtime Berkeley Rep collaborators. Kent Dorsey (scenic designer) has designed sets for a number of Berkeley Rep productions, including *The Alchemist, For Better or Worse, Serious Money, The Importance of Being Earnest, Dancing at Lughnasa, Mother Jones*, and *Blue Window*. Beaver Bauer (costume designer) designed several Berkeley Rep productions: *What the Butler Saw, Tartuffe, Blue Window, In Perpetuity Throughout the Universe, Rhinoceros, The House of Blue Leaves*, and *Menocchio*. Alexander V. Nichols (lighting designer) returns to Berkeley Rep for his 26th production. His theatre credits include Berkeley Rep’s production of *Wishful Drinking* here and on Broadway, *Hugh Jackman Back On Broadway*, and the off-Broadway productions of *Bridge and Tunnel* (also at Berkeley Rep), *Horizon, In the Wake, Los Big Names, Taking Over*, and *Through the Night*. Composer Rob Milburn and sound designer Michael Bodeen have recently composed music and designed sound for Berkeley Rep’s production of *No Man’s Land*, which moves to Broadway this fall.

The stage manager for the production of **Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike** is Michael Suenkel, Berkeley Rep’s resident production stage manager. **Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike** is made possible by executive producers Bill Falik and Diana Cohen, and by production sponsor the Bernard Osher Foundation.

During the run of **Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike** audiences can enjoy many special events:

- **Low-cost previews** take place on Friday; September 20; Saturday, September 21; and on Tuesday, September 24 @ 8:00 PM and on Sunday, September 22 @ 7:00 PM.
- **Opening Night festivities** are held on Wednesday, September 25 @ 8:00 PM with a pre-show dinner for donors and a post-show party for audiences.
- **Teen Night** begins at 6:30 PM on Friday, September 20 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, free 30-minute docent presentations** take place before Tuesday and Thursday evening performances and free discussions take place after all weekend matinees.
- **Last Call, free gathering** featuring wine, spirits, and other culinary delights from local vendors immediately following the evening performance on Saturday, September 28.
- **Post-play discussions** moderated by theatre professionals follow the 8:00 PM shows on Thursday, September 26; Friday, October 4; and Tuesday, October 8. Post-show discussions with Berkeley Rep’s docents take place after all weekend matinees.

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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 on board as company sponsors.

This season Berkeley Rep will partner with the Theatre Development Fund to offer 10 open-captioned performances. This state-of-the-art technology will allow Berkeley Rep to open its doors to a wider community by making performances accessible to patrons with hearing loss. An open-captioned performance for Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike will take place Sunday, October 20, 2013 at 2:00 PM.

Individual tickets to Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike 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.

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

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE

WHO: Written by Christopher Durang
Directed by Richard E.T. White

Creative team: Kent Dorsey (scenic designer), Beaver Bauer (costume designer), Alexander V. Nichols (lighting designer), and Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen (composers and sound designers)

Cast: Anthony Fusco (Vanya), Lorri Holt (Masha), Mike Junek (Spike), Caroline Kaplan (Nina), Sharon Lockwood (Sonia), and Heather Alicia Simms (Cassandra)

WHAT: In Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, this year’s Tony Award winner for Best Play, Masha returns to the forlorn family farmhouse with her prized 20-something boy toy Spike, and the stage is set for an absurd weekend of general hilarity.

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

WHEN: 35 PERFORMANCES ONLY: September 20- October 20 2013
• Tuesdays @ 8:00 PM
• Wednesdays @ 8:00 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:

Low-cost previews: Friday 9/20, Saturday 9/21 & Tuesday 9/24 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 9/22 @ 7:00 PM
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Repartee: FREE docent talks before Tuesday and Thursday evening performances and free discussions after all weekend matinees
Last Call: Saturday 9/28 following the evening performance
Post-play discussions: Thursday 9/26, Friday 10/4, and Tuesday 10/8 following the performance

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

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