FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BERKELEY REP PRESENTS TARELL ALVIN McCRANEY’S HEAD OF PASSES

Acclaimed director Tina Landau to stage drama about faith and family

March 11, 2015 – Berkeley Repertory Theatre proudly welcomes MacArthur “Genius” Award winner Tarell Alvin McCraney for the West Coast premiere of Head of Passes, a poignant and poetic story about the journey of family and faith, trial and tribulation. In a dilapidated house near the ever-shifting mouth of the Mississippi, Shelah’s family gathers on a stormy night for her birthday — bringing ghosts and secrets of the past with them. As her roof buckles under the weight of the rain, Shelah’s convictions begin to wash away, leaving her to excavate the truths buried below. Directed by Tina Landau, the riveting Head of Passes comes to the Bay Area straight from its critically lauded world premiere in Chicago. Head of Passes is a co-production with the Public Theater in New York. It begins previews on Berkeley Rep’s intimate Thrust Stage on Friday, April 10, opens on Friday, April 17, and runs through Sunday, May 24, 2015. Press night for Head of Passes will be held on Friday, April 17, 2015. Individual tickets start at $29 and can be purchased by phone at (510) 647-2949 or online at berkeleyrep.org.

“We’re delighted to present Head of Passes, a new play penned by Tarell Alvin McCraney,” says Michael Leibert Artistic Director Tony Taccone. “Tarell is a wonderful writer who we’ve been yearning to work with for a long time. Head of Passes chronicles a day in the life of this African American family that has to endure an unbearable amount of suffering. It’s not about insurmountable loss but incomprehensible loss and unrelenting faith. We’re thrilled to have Tina, a formidable director who helmed the world premiere at Steppenwolf, mount the production here.”

“I’m thrilled to be making my debut at Berkeley Rep,” remarks McCraney. “For Head of Passes I was taken with the idea behind unyielding faith and how we hold on to it. In theatre I found so few people willing to talk about the bedrock of faith being a sort of human need. My experience of faith in the African American culture is with women, and so I chose to center the drama around a single female character. This play is about a literal discourse in faith, and I hope others join the conversation.”

Referencing the Steppenwolf world premiere, the Chicago Tribune raves, “McCraney writes the richest dialogue of any scribe of his generation…[It] is the well-worth-seeing, must-be-supported work of an extraordinarily gifted and ambitious writer who is working with an ideal director in Tina Landau.” Chicago Now lauds Head of Passes as “a heart-wrenching, thought-provoking, and soul-stirring experience. It’s the type of show that continues to percolate conversation long after the curtain.” WBEZ adds, “Unbelievably powerful…an extraordinary play.”

MORE
Tarell Alvin McCraney's plays include *The Brothers Size*, *In the Red and Brown Water*, and *Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet*. His other plays include *Choir Boy* and *Wig Out!* He is the recipient of the Whiting Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, the Evening Standard Award, *The New York Times* Outstanding Playwright Award, the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, the Windham Campbell Award, a 2013 MacArthur "Genius" Grant, and a Doris Duke Artist Award. McCraney is a graduate from the New World School of the Arts, The Theatre School at DePaul University, and the Yale School of Drama. He is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, a resident playwright at New Dramatists, and a member of Teo Castellanos/D-Projects in Miami.

Tina Landau is a writer and director and an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, where her directing credits include *The Wheel*, *Head of Passes*, *Hot L Baltimore*, *The Brother/Sister Plays*, *Superior Donuts*, *The Tempest*, *The Time of Your Life* (also at Seattle Repertory Theatre and American Conservatory Theater), *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Space* (also writer, Mark Taper Forum and the Public Theater), and Charles Mee's *Berlin Circle* and *Time to Burn*. Her New York credits include Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* (New York Theatre Workshop), Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Wig Out!* (the Vineyard Theatre) and *In the Red and Brown Water* (the Public), Bill Irwin/David Shiner's *Old Hats* and Mee's *Big Love* and *Iphigenia 2.0* (Signature Theatre Company), Tracy Letts' *Superior Donuts* (Broadway), *Bells Are Ringing* (Broadway), *Floyd Collins* (also bookwriter, Playwrights Horizons), and *Dream True* (also lyrics/bookwriter, the Vineyard Theatre). Her regional credits include *Beauty* (also writer, La Jolla Playhouse), *Antony and Cleopatra* (Harford Stage), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (McCarter Theatre Center and Paper Mill Playhouse). Landau teaches regularly and has co-authored, with Anne Bogart, *The Viewpoints Book*.

**Head of Passes** features a multi-talented ensemble of accomplished actors — many of whom make their Berkeley Rep debut with this production:

- **François Battiste** (Aubrey) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. He has been seen on Broadway in *Bronx Bombers* (Circle in the Square), *Prelude to a Kiss* (Roundabout Theatre Company), and *Magic/Bird* (Longacre Theatre). His off-Broadway credits include *Detroit '67* (the Public Theater), *Broke-ology* (Lincoln Center), *The Good Negro* (the Public, Obie Award, Lortel nomination), *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* (New York Shakespeare Festival at the Delacorte), among others. Battiste has also appeared in shows at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Sundance, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Goodman Theatre, and Victory Gardens Theater.

- **Cheryl Lynn Bruce** (Shelah) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. She premiered in *The Gospel of Lovingkindness* (Victory Gardens Theater), Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Head of Passes* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company), and Danai Gurira's *The Convert* (McCarter Theatre Center, the Goodman Theatre, the Kirk Douglas Theatre). Her performances earned a Joseph Jefferson nomination and an Ovation Award nomination and a NAACP Theatre Award in Los Angeles. Bruce's regional credits include *Harriet Jacobs* and *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Kansas City Repertory Theatre), *Gem of the Ocean* (Ensemble Theatre Company), and *The Story* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater).

- **Jonathan Burke** (Crier) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. He was most recently seen as David Heard in Tarell Alvin McCraney's *Choir Boy* at the Studio Theatre. His national tour credits include *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (Zebulun; u/s Judah; u/s Joseph), *Mary Poppins*, *A Christmas Story: The Musical*, and *Cats* (Mungojerrie). Burke was seen off Broadway in the world premiere of *Langston in Harlem* (Junior Addict) at Urban Stages, as well as in *Jazz A La Carte* at the Apollo Theater with Savion Glover. Regionally his work includes *Amazing Grace* at Goodspeed Musicals, *Hairspray* at the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, and *Rent* at the Hangar Theatre, among others.

MORE
- **James Carpenter** (Dr. Anderson) last appeared at Berkeley Rep in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and has performed in over 30 productions at the Theatre during his 12-year tenure as an associate artist. His other Bay Area credits include American Conservatory Theater, Aurora Theatre Company, Cutting Ball Theater, Magic Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and TheatreWorks. He is currently in his 12th season as an associate artist with California Shakespeare Theater. His other regional credits include work at Arizona Theatre Company, the Huntington Theatre Company, Intiman Theatre, the Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Yale Repertory Theatre.

- **Brian Tyree Henry** (Spencer) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. He appeared in Tarell Alvin McCraney’s trilogy *The Brother/Sister Plays* at McCarter Theatre Center, and *The Brother/Sister Plays: The Brothers Size* at the Public Theater, the Studio Theatre, and the Alley Theatre. He also appeared at the Public in *The Fortress of Solitude* and *Talk About Race*. Henry’s Broadway credits include *The Book of Mormon*, and other regional credits include *A Civil War Christmas* at Long Wharf Theatre.

- **Sullivan Jones** (The Angel) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. He most recently appeared in Center Stage’s production of *One Night In Miami* as Cassius Clay, a role which he originated at Los Angeles’ Rouge Machine Theater (LA Drama Critics’ Award and NAACP Award). His other regional credits include *Clementine in the Lower Nine* at TheaterWorks (Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award nomination), *Twelfth Night* and *Cinderella* at African-American Shakespeare Company, and *Intimate Apparel* and *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot* at AlterTheater.

- **Nikkole Salter** (Cookie) makes her Berkeley Rep debut. Salter is an Obie Award-winning actress and playwright. Her off-Broadway credits include *Tough Titty* (the Paradise Factory), *Inked Baby* (Playwrights Horizons), and *In the Continuum* (Primary Stages). Nikkole’s regional credits include *Stick Fly* (Arena Stage/the Huntington Theatre Company), *Gee’s Bend* (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park and Kansas City Repertory Theatre), *Luck of the Irish* (the Huntington), *The Old Settler* (Luna Stage), *Jitney* (the Studio Theatre), and more.

- **Kimberly Scott** (Mae) makes her Berkeley Rep debut. She most recently played Anne in the world premiere of *Familiar* by Danai Gurira at Yale Repertory Theatre. She also appeared at Yale in *Death of a Salesman* as Linda Loman, and as Molly Cunningham in *August Wilson’s Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations on Broadway). Scott spent five seasons at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, playing Mama Nadi in *Ruined*, Mistress Quickly in *Henry IV, Part 2*, and creating roles in *American Night: The Ballad of Juan José* by Culture Clash, *Party People* by UNIVERSES, and *The Liquid Plain* by Naomi Wallace, all part of American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle. Her off-Broadway credits include Mabou Mines’ *Lear* and *The Gospel at Colonus*.

- **Michael A. Shepperd** (Creaker) makes his Berkeley Rep debut. He is currently the co-artistic director of Los Angeles’ multi-award-winning Celebration Theatre (celebrationtheatre.com), where his producing, directing, and acting credits include *The Color Purple*, *Four*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Take Me Out*, *Coffee Will Make You Black*, *[title of show]*, and numerous others in his nine years with the company. Other credits include *Choir Boy*, *Master Harold and the Boys* (NAACP Theatre Award), *Steel* (John Henry, Ovation Award), and *Intimate Apparel* (NAACP Theatre Award for Supporting Actor). Shepperd’s Broadway, off-Broadway, and other credits include *Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan*; *Little Shop of Horrors*; *Caroline, or Change*; and *Five Guys Named Moe*. 

MORE
The creative team for *Head of Passes* includes G.W. Skip Mercier (scenic designer), Toni-Leslie James (costume designer), Scott Zielinski (lighting designer), and Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen (sound designers). The stage manager for *Head of Passes* is Leslie M. Radin.

The 2014-15 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 KPIX-TV (Channel 5) as a first-year season sponsor. *Head of Passes* is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Strauch Kulhanjian Family, Jack and Betty Schafer, and Kerry Francis and John Jimerson.

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.

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FACT SHEET

HEAD OF PASSES

WHO:
Written by Tarell Alvin McCraney
Directed by Tina Landau

Cast: Francois Battiste (Aubrey), Cheryl Lynn Bruce (Shelah), Jonathan Burke (Crier), James Carpenter (Dr. Anderson), Brian Tyree Henry (Spencer), Sullivan Jones (The Angel), Nikkole Salter (Cookie), Kimberly Scott (Mae), and Michael A. Shepperd (Creaker)

Creative team: G. W. Skip Mercier (scenic designer), Toni-Leslie James (costume designer), Scott Zielinski (lighting designer), and Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen (sound designers)

WHAT:
Berkeley Rep proudly presents the West Coast premiere of a poignant and poetic new play by MacArthur “Genius” Award winner Tarell Alvin McCraney. In Head of Passes, Shelah gathers her family together on a stormy night for her birthday — bringing ghosts and secrets of the past with them.

WHERE:
Berkeley Repertory Theatre
Thrust Stage, 2025 Addison Street @ Shattuck, Berkeley, CA 94704

WHEN:
51 PERFORMANCES: April 10 – May 24, 2015

Tuesdays and Fridays @ 8:00 PM
Wednesdays @ 7:00 PM

Thursdays @ 8:00 PM and 2:00 & 8:00 PM on 4/23 and 5/21

Saturdays @ 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM; no matinee on 4/11 and 4/25

Sundays @ 2:00 PM and 7:00 PM; no matinee on 4/12

No performance on Tuesday 5/19

Special Events:

Low-cost previews: Friday 4/10, Saturday 4/11, Tuesday 4/14, Thursday 4/16 @ 8:00 PM and Sunday 4/12 and Wednesday 4/15 @ 7:00 PM

Opening Night: Friday 4/17 @ 8:00 PM; a preshow dinner will be held the David Bowers Center sponsored by Autumn Press, ETC Catering, C.G. Di Arie Vineyard and Winery, and the David Brower Center

Teen Night: Friday 4/24 @ 6:30 PM

Last Call: Sample wine, spirits, and other culinary delights from local vendors — all for FREE! Friday 4/24 following the performance

Post-play discussions: Thursday 4/30, Tuesday 5/5, and Friday 5/15 after the show

HOW MUCH:

Premium: $49-79 · Section A: $39-67 · Section B: $29-55 (subject to change)

For more information call, (510) 647-2949 – berkeleyrep.org

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

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