For Immediate Release

BERKELEY REP PRESENTS AN OCTOROON
West Coast premiere of Obie Award-winning play by MacArthur Fellow Branden Jacobs-Jenkins closes the season

May 4, 2017- Berkeley Repertory Theatre today announced the West Coast premiere of An Octoroon written by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins and directed by Eric Ting will close out its season. The Obie Award-winning play begins previews on Friday, June 23, and the show runs through Sunday, July 23. Individual tickets begin at $29 and can be purchased online at berkeleyrep.org or by phone, 510 647-2949. Press night will be Friday, June 30.

“I’m so happy to have Eric Ting on board,” says Berkeley Rep’s Michael Leibert Artistic Director Tony Taccone. “I think he is a great choice to direct this unconventional story. He is an accomplished artist and I know he will handle this challenging material with great success.”

“The essential gift of a writer like Branden is the unflinching courage with which he confronts the legacy of our nation’s dark origins,” says director Eric Ting. “That he does so with audacity and wit and vivid theatricality is what makes him a genius. I’m thrilled that Berkeley Rep is bringing An Octoroon to the Bay Area and honored to be directing it.”

Playwright and 2016 MacArthur Fellow Branden Jacobs-Jenkins won the Obie Award for his radical, incendiary, and subversively funny riff on Dion Boucicault’s once-popular 1859 mustache-twirling melodrama. Judge Peyton is dead, and his plantation Terrebonne is on the brink of foreclosure. George, the high-minded heir apparent, falls for the lovely Zoe, who is one-eighth black. But the bigoted plantation queen has eyes for George, and the dastardly overseer M’Closky plots to keep Zoe and Terrebonne for himself. A spectacular collision of the antebellum South and 21st-century cultural politics, An Octoroon is “This decade’s most eloquent theatrical statement on race in America today,” says the New York Times.

Audiences are invited to attend a free class on Saturday, June 17 at 5pm at Berkeley Rep’s School of Theatre. Exploring Form: The Anatomy of a Play will examine how a play is crafted to shape our comprehension of the story. An Octoroon uses the same dramatic conventions of Dion Boucicault’s 1859 melodrama, The Octoroon, but it also subverts those conventions to explore race in America in contemporary terms. Looking at source material and examples in the play, participants will unpack how Jacobs-Jenkins uses adaptation, melodrama, and meta-theatre as storytelling tools. The class will be taught by Literary Manager Sarah Rose Leonard. For more information, visit https://www.eventbrite.com/e/exploring-form-the-anatomy-of-a-play-tickets-34218585711

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Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (Playwright)
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins is a Brooklyn-based playwright whose credits include War (Lincoln Center/LCT3), Gloria (Vineyard Theatre; Pulitzer Prize finalist), Appropriate (Signature Theatre; Obie Award), An Octoroon (Soho Rep; Obie Award), and Neighbors (the Public Theater). He is a Residency
Five playwright at Signature Theatre and is under commissions from LCT3/Lincoln Center Theater, MTC/Sloan, and the Steppenwolf Theatre Company. His recent honors include the Windham-Campbell Prize for Drama, the PEN/Laura Pels International Foundation Theatre Award, the Benjamin H. Danks Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Steinberg Playwriting Award, and the inaugural Tennessee Williams Award. In addition to holding an MA in Performance Studies from NYU, Jacobs-Jenkins is also a graduate of the Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at the Juilliard School. He currently teaches in the Hunter College Playwriting MFA Program, where is a Master-Artist-in-Residence.

**Eric Ting** (Director)
Eric is an Obie Award-winning director and was appointed artistic director of California Shakespeare Theater in November of 2015. Deeply committed throughout his career to the development of new and diverse voices for the theatre, Eric has directed plays (many of them world premieres) by Sam Hunter, Aditi Kapil, Kimber Lee, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, Laura Jacqmin, Kenneth Lin, Kristoffer Diaz, Anna Deavere Smith, and others. He has also been recognized for his co-adaptation of Hemingway’s *Old Man & the Sea* and his controversial interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* set during the Vietnam War. His work has been seen at Manhattan Theatre Club, Soho Rep, the Public Theater, Goodman Theatre, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Hartford Stage, BAM Next Wave, Cincinnati Playhouse, and the Alliance Theatre; as well as internationally, including Singapore, France, Canada, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Bali.

**Afi Bijou** (Minnie) makes her Berkeley Rep debut in *An Octoroon*. Her New York credits include *Holler If You Hear Me* (Broadway), *Fela!* (Broadway), *Once on This Island* (original Broadway cast), *Holiday Heart* (off Broadway), and *Bullet for Adolf* (off Broadway). Regional credits include *The Blood Quilt* (Arena Stage) and *Good Goods, Crumbs from the Table of Joy, and Breath Boom* (Yale Repertory Theatre). Film/TV credits include roles on *The Night of, Crime, Fresh, and Finding Fela*, among others.

**Jasmine Bracey** (Dido) is thrilled to be making her Berkeley Rep debut. Her regional theatre credits include *Animal Farm* (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); *Shakespeare’s Greatest Hits* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); *Clybourne Park, WIT, The Little Foxes, O Beautiful, Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Irresistible Rise of Arturo Ui, and Our Town* (Resident Ensemble Players); *You Can’t Take It with You* (the Alley Theatre); *As You Like It* (the Acting Company); *Macando* (the Guthrie Theater); and *Antony and Cleopatra* (Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival). Film/television credits include *Chicago P.D., Mothers of God, and Rodney*. Training: University of Delaware Professional Theatre Training Program, MFA, class of 2011.

**Afua Busia** (Grace) is thrilled to be making her debut at Berkeley Rep this summer! She is currently an MFA candidate at American Conservatory Theater. She most recently appeared in ACT’s MFA production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. She also attended American University where she appeared in *Cabaret*, *Talking With*, and *Measure for Measure*. Regional credits include *The Little Mermaid* (Imagination Stage).

**Lance Gardner** (BJJ/George/M’Closky) Lance Gardner last appeared at Berkeley Rep in *Yellowjackets*. He most recently in *The Christians* at SF Playhouse. He has performed at California Shakespeare Theater, TheatreWorks in Silicon Valley, Marin Theatre Company, Magic Theatre, Encore Theatre, Climate Theatre, and more. He is the producer and host of the upcoming podcast Re: TheatRe.

**Sydney Morton** (Zoe) Sydney Morton is so excited to make her debut at Berkeley Rep! Original Broadway casts include *Memphis, Evita, Motown* (Florence Ballard), and *American Psycho*. National tours include *Flashdance* (Alex) and *Jersey Boys* (Chicago company). Regional credits include *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Esmeralda, Ogunquit Playhouse), *High School Musical* (Gabriella, Paper Mill Playhouse), The Muny, and Pittsburgh CLO. Film credits include *The Intern, Service to Man, and Love, New York*. TV credits include *She’s Gotta Have It* (Cheryl Overstreet, Netflix), *Jessica Jones* (Netflix), and *The Sound of Music Live* (NBC). Training includes a BFA in Musical Theater from the University of Michigan (Go Blue!), and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.
Ray Porter (Playwright/Wahnotee/La Fouche) This is Ray Porter’s first appearance at Berkeley Rep. He was with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for 18 seasons and last appeared in the Bay Area as Rosencrantz in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead at American Conservatory Theater. Film/TV credits include Sons of Anarchy, The Mentalist, The Closer, Frasier, Justified, Monk, Almost Famous, The Runaways, Argo, and the Justice League.

Lisa Quoresimo (Br’er Rabbit) Lisa is thrilled to be making her debut at Berkeley Rep. Lisa has most recently been seen music directing The Events at Shotgun Players, and playing Masha in Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike and Dolly Levi in Hello, Dolly. She has written and directed several musicals, including Siddhartha the Bright Path (with Emily Klon and Danny Duncan), which have been produced across the country and internationally. She served for many years as the artistic director of the Kairos Theatre in New York City, trained at Circle in the Square, and taught on the faculties of NYU and the Manhattan School of Music. She is currently in the Theatre/Performance Studies Department at UC Davis.

Jennifer Regan (Dora) last appeared at Berkeley Rep in Troublemaker, or The Freakin Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright. New York credits include Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, Born Yesterday, and The Lady from Dubuque (Broadway and West End, London) and How I Learned to Drive, Buffalo Gal, and Pig Farm (off Broadway). Regional credits include Twelfth Night (Hartford Stage), Lost in Yonkers, Resurrection Blues, and The Trojan Women (the Old Globe), Edgardo Mine (the Guthrie Theater), The Royal Family (Pittsburgh Public Theater), and A Streetcar Named Desire (Barrington Stage Company). Film/TV work includes recurring and guest roles on The Heart, She Holler; Neon Joe: Werewolf Hunter; Blindspot; Mysteries of Laura; Happyish; Elementary; Law & Order: SVU and CSI; The Humbling; The Winning Season; Ten Stories Tall; and My Dead Boyfriend, among others.

Amir Talai (Assistant/Pete/Paul) Amir, a San Francisco native, is thrilled to be back where he grew up and began working professionally. His dad even owned Au Coquelet, around the corner from Berkeley Rep. Soon after graduating from Cal, he worked at Berkeley Rep as an understudy and on a school tour. Since leaving San Francisco, he’s earned over 100 film and TV credits, including What to Expect When You’re Expecting, Harold and Kumar 2, and, most recently, The Circle with Tom Hanks. In 2018 he will appear opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger in Gunther and on the new Fox series LA to Vegas. In addition to acting, Amir is passionate about and active in several social movements, serving on the boards of the Story of Stuff and Healing Justice, and he volunteers to improve representation for actors of color, oppose police violence, and support progressive politicians.

The creative team includes Arnulfo Maldonado (scenic designer), Montana Blanco (costume designer), Jyoun Chang (lighting designer), and Jake Rodriguez (sound designer).

For the 2016-17 season Berkeley Rep recognizes the generosity of season sponsors of BART, Peet’s Coffee, and Wells Fargo. An Octroooin is also made possible by the support of individual season sponsors Jack and Betty Schafer, Michael and Sue Steinberg, and The Strauch Kulhanjian Family, and executive sponsors Michelle Branch and Dale Cook, Kerry Francis and John Jimerson, and Guy Tiphone.

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 nearly 400 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 Peet’s Theatre, the 600-seat Roda Theatre, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre, and a spacious campus in West Berkeley – are helping revitalize a renowned city. Learn more at berkeleyrep.org

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