For Immediate Release

BERKELEY REP’S OVATION GALA RAISES OVER $1 MILLION
Event celebrated Tony Taccone’s leadership as Artistic Director
Featured tributes from Tony Kushner, Rita Moreno, and Oskar Eustis

June 12, 2019 – This past Friday evening, June 7, Bay Area arts supporters gathered at The Ritz-Carlton San Francisco to celebrate Berkeley Repertory Theatre and to honor outgoing Artistic Director Tony Taccone for his 22 years of leadership. The sold-out event, OVATION: A Tribute to Tony Taccone, raised over $1 million in support of the nonprofit’s ambitious artistic endeavors and education programs.

Hosted by local luminary Jonathan Moscone, this year’s festivities illuminated and honored Taccone’s legacy as a champion of artists, an artistic collaborator, and a visionary leader. The evening’s tributes started off with a toast (and roast) from Taccone’s sons Jorma (a member of sketch comedy troupe The Lonely Island) and Asa (lead singer of the band Electric Guest), who first shared their recollections and appreciation for their father’s love and support of them as artists before unveiling an original music video they produced featuring a humorous roast on Taccone’s leadership style.

The lighthearted video was followed by heartfelt and deeply personal homages from Public Theater Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner, who each shared their gratitude and respect for Taccone as both a colleague and, more importantly, as a friend. Afterward, Rita Moreno shared her appreciation and completed her comments by serenading Taccone with “This Is All I Ask” by Gordon Jenkins, the closing number from Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup, a show Taccone wrote for Moreno.

The evening continued with a live auction and paddle raise led by auctioneer Dawnmarie Kotsonis, aka The Gavel Girl, that raised more than $400K in 45 minutes. Berkeley Rep’s fellowship program was highlighted during the paddle raise in support after hearing from three of Taccone’s mentees who graduated from the program: Crowded Fire Theatre Artistic Director Mina Morita, Portland Center Stage Artistic Director Marissa Wolfe, and Courage Campaign President and Executive Director Eddie Kurtz. The former Berkeley Rep fellows recognized Taccone by sharing their memorable moments training and working with him.

After the auctions, Managing Director Susan Medak shared the pleasures (and pains) of working with Taccone for 22 years. She shared her appreciation for his artistic leadership and generosity that cemented their collaboration in growing Berkeley Rep into a theatre with not only local, but also national influence and respect.

To close out the presentations, Taccone addressed the packed ballroom, sharing his memories of Berkeley Rep and recalling how time and again Managing Director Susan Medak always found a way to support his vision no matter her concerns about the financial challenges of running a nonprofit theatre. He closed his heartfelt remarks by saying, “In the words of my favorite playwright, the world only spins forward. As you have blessed me, so, I bless you.”

The evening concluded with an electric performance by Bob the Drag Queen, winner of season eight of RuPaul’s Drag Race, and who was directed by Taccone in the 2018 production of Angels in America.

“We owe the success of the evening to our amazing gala committee, to the 475 friends who shared the evening with us, and to our dedicated staff,” said Medak. “Everyone came out tonight to make sure Tony knew just how much we’ve appreciated his leadership.”
OVATION: A Tribute to Tony Taccone was made possible by the generosity of lead sponsors Fossil Group, Bruce Golden and Michelle Mercer, Robin and Rich Edwards, Bill Falik and Diana Cohen and Marjorie Randolph, Richard Grand Foundation, and The Strauch Kulhanjian Family. The planning committee for the event included Jill Fugaro, Laura Severino, Deborah Barrera, Narsai M. David, Rich Edwards, Robin Edwards, Sandra Eggers, Scott Haber, Sandra McCandless, Sudha Pennathur, Margaret Rothschild, Audrey Rose Sockolov, Jean Strunsky, Gail Wagner, and Susan Wolin.

ABOUT BERKELEY REP
Berkeley Repertory Theatre has grown from a storefront stage to an international leader in innovative theatre. Known for its ambition, relevance, and excellence, as well as its adventurous audience, the nonprofit has provided a welcoming home for emerging and established artists since 1968. Over 5.5 million people have enjoyed nearly 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, which have gone on to win six Tony Awards, seven Obie Awards, nine Drama Desk Awards, one Grammy Award, and many other honors. Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. Its School of Theatre engages and educates some 20,000 people a year and helps build the audiences of tomorrow with its nationally recognized teen programs. Berkeley Rep’s bustling facilities – which also include the 400-seat Peet’s Theatre, the 600-seat Roda Theatre, and a spacious campus in West Berkeley – are helping revitalize a renowned city. Be a Rep. Learn more at berkeleyrep.org.

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