For Immediate Release

BERKELEY REP’S OVATION VIRTUAL GALA EXCEEDS GOAL AND RAISES OVER $940,000

Online event celebrated Anna Deavere Smith

April 20, 2020 – This past Saturday evening, April 18, Bay Area arts supporters gathered for a live stream event to celebrate Berkeley Repertory Theatre and to honor actor, writer, and teacher Anna Deavere Smith for her many creative achievements and her tremendous influence on the American theatre. Smith, who spoke remotely from her home, said, “I consider the Berkeley Rep audience to be my home base…This theatre can do anything. When the pandemic is over, you know you have a community that will come to you and this could be Berkeley Rep’s chance to redefine what a regional theatre can create. I think it’s a very exciting moment.”

The event moved online because of Covid-19 and surpassed its goal, raising over $940,000 in support of the nonprofit’s ambitious artistic endeavors, education programs, and the transformative power of theatre. “Being a theatre that is now run by three women: myself, Johanna Pfaelzer, and Board Chair Gail Wagner, it seems right to say that in this time of adversity, we will persist,” said Managing Director Susie Medak. “And our persistence shows in the fact that we, along with our hardworking, incredible development staff and gala committee, surpassed our fundraising goal.”

Hosted by Medak and Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer, this year’s event was on a smaller scale but still managed to inspire and engage. “Theatre connects us to everything that makes us human,” said Pfaelzer. “And at Berkeley Rep, it has been all about the people…the audience, the artists, artisans, and staff. We thank everyone for their support and I look forward to a time when we all can be together again.”

Local musician Marcus Shelby, who worked with Anna Deavere Smith in Berkeley Rep’s production of Notes from the Field: Doing Time in Education, The California Chapter (2015), performed a moving rendition of “Amazing Grace.” “Anna Deavere Smith is a hero of mine,” said Shelby. “She gave everyone who worked on Notes from the Field a strong sense of commitment of how we could work and be closer to young people. It’s something I still do today with my work in the juvenile justice centers.”

The evening closed with a video of Berkeley Rep staff members dancing to “Can’t Get Next To You” from Ain’t Too Proud: The Life and Times of The Temptations (2017). Ain’t Too Proud remains the highest grossing show in the Theatre’s history and went on to receive 12 Tony Award nominations with Sergio Trujillo winning the award for Best Choreography.

OVATION was made possible by the generosity of Platinum sponsors Robin and Rich Edwards, Bruce Golden and Michelle Mercer, Marcia and Richard Grand, Sudha Pennathur and Ed Messerly, Arthur Rock, The Strauch Kulhanjian Family, and Gail and Arne Wagner.

The planning committee for the event was led by co-chairs Jill Fugaro and Laura Severino and includes Deborah Barrera, Ronnie Caplane, Narsai 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, one Pulitzer Prize, and
many other honors. Berkeley Rep received the Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre in 1997. To formalize, enhance, and expand the processes by which Berkeley Rep makes theatre, The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep’s Center for the Creation and Development of New Work was launched in 2012. The Berkeley Rep 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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