FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BERKELEY REPERTORY THEATRE ANNOUNCES FREE NATIONWIDE RADIO PLAY OF IT CAN’T HAPPEN HERE STARRING ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE DAVID STRATHAIRM
Theatres Across the Country Join as Broadcast Partners

September 10, 2020 — Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer today announced a new adaptation of Sinclair Lewis’ novel, It Can’t Happen Here. Written in 1935 during the rise of fascism in Europe, Lewis’ darkly satirical It Can’t Happen Here follows the ascent of a demagogue who becomes president of the United States by promising to return the country to greatness. In 2016 Berkeley Rep unveiled a new stage adaptation of Lewis’ prescient novel; one week after that production ended, the presidential election roiled our nation. Now, Berkeley Rep reprises that production with the same director and much of the original cast, but this time as a radio play in four episodes, just in time for the 2020 presidential election. The audio drama is being offered free to organizations across the country. Berkeley Rep intends for the project to encourage dialogue and motivate citizens to exercise their civic power and vote.

The radio production, in collaboration with broadcast partners including American Conservatory Theater, Arena Stage, Center Theatre Group, La Jolla Playhouse, Roundabout Theatre Company, Seattle Repertory Theatre, South Coast Repertory, and many others, can be heard on Tuesday, October 13 at 5PM PST/8PM EST via YouTube. Berkeley Rep's former Artistic Director Tony Taccone along with screenwriter Bennett S. Cohen returns with the original director, two-time Obie Award winner Lisa Peterson. The trio previously collaborated on It Can’t Happen Here when it had its premiere at Berkeley Rep in 2016.

Oscar-nominated actor David Strathairn (Good Night, and Good Luck) will join many of the previous cast members to bring this political drama to life.

“I am incredibly proud to help Tony, Bennett, Lisa, and this amazing cast reimagine this vital story in a new format – this is the first significant producing project we have taken on since the pandemic hit, and I can’t imagine a more timely story,” says Artistic Director Johanna Pfaelzer. “In 1936, shortly after the novel’s publication, Sinclair Lewis created a theatrical version of It Can’t Happen Here which was produced by the WPA, opening simultaneously in theatres across the country. We at Berkeley Rep are delighted to now build upon that legacy by partnering with theatres from New York to Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, up and down the West Coast and numerous places in between to share this story for free with the widest possible audience. This play is a reminder of the power that we as citizens have to determine our elected officials, and a call to action to exercise that power at the polls.”

A live Q&A session with the creative team will take place following the broadcast.
Tony Taccone (Adaptor) was the Michael Leibert Artistic Director of Berkeley Rep for over 30 years. During Taccone’s tenure as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, the Tony Award-winning nonprofit earned a reputation as an international leader in innovative theatre. In those years, Berkeley Rep presented more than 70 world, American, and West Coast premieres and sent 24 shows to New York, two to London, and one to Hong Kong. Taccone has staged more than 40 plays in Berkeley, including new work from Julia Cho, John Leguizamo, Daniel Handler, Culture Clash, Rinde Eckert, David Edgar, Danny Hoch, Geoff Hoyle, and Itamar Moses. He directed the shows that transferred to London, Continental Divide and Tiny Kushner, and three that landed on Broadway: Bridge & Tunnel, Wishful Drinking, and Latin History for Morons. Prior to working at Berkeley Rep, Taccone served as artistic director of Eureka Theatre, which produced the American premieres of plays by Dario Fo, Caryl Churchill, and David Edgar before focusing on a new generation of American writers. While at the Eureka, Taccone commissioned Tony Kushner’s legendary Angels in America and co-directed its world premiere. He has collaborated with Kushner on eight plays at Berkeley Rep, including The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures. Taccone’s regional credits include Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, Center Theatre Group, the Eureka Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, the Huntington Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, The Public Theater, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. As a playwright, he debuted Ghost Light, Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup, Game On, written with Dan Hoyle, and It Can’t Happen Here, written with Bennett S. Cohen. In 2012, Taccone received the Margo Jones Award for “demonstrating a significant impact, understanding, and affirmation of playwriting, with a commitment to the living theatre.” In 2018 he directed the revival of Angels in America at Berkeley Rep. In 2019 he directed and co-wrote (with John Leguizamo) the world premiere of Kiss My Aztec! at Berkeley Rep.

Bennett S. Cohen (Adaptor) is a graduate of Yale University’s School of Drama and UC Berkeley. Cohen has worked in theatre, film, and television. His play American Music was chosen to be part of the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center and has had numerous productions. His play Tequila was originally produced by the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco and has been published in West Coast Plays #8. Cohen has written extensively for film and television, working with such companies as Showtime, Paramount Television, Universal Television, and Fox International Productions, among others. He has adapted two novels for the screen, Jack Higgins’ WWII-era thriller Night of the Fox and Roderick Thorpe’s police drama Rainbow Drive. Most recently, Cohen wrote the feature film The Last Voyage of Zheng He.

Lisa Peterson (Director), formerly Berkeley Rep’s associate director, returns to the Theatre, where she directed Culture Clash (Still) in America, The Good Book (co-written with Denis O’Hare), Office Hour, Watch on the Rhine, It Can’t Happen Here, The Madwoman in the Volvo, An Iliad (also co-written with Denis O’Hare), Mother Courage, The Fall, and Antony & Cleopatra. She directed Lauren Yee’s The Great Leap at American Conservatory Theater last year. At Center Theatre Group, she recently directed Lynn Nottage’s Sweat as well as Culture Clash’s Chavez Ravine (2015 Ovation Award, Best Production), Palestine, New Mexico, and Water and Power, among other plays. She co-wrote and directed An Iliad with Denis O’Hare (Broad Stage, New York Theatre Workshop, Obie and Lucille Lortel awards). A two-time Obie Award-winner, she has directed world premieres by Tony Kushner, Beth Henley, Naomi Wallace, Chay Yew, Luis Alfaro, Fernanda Coppola, David Henry Hwang, Stephen Belber, Jose Rivera, Ellen McLaughlin, Marlene Meyer, Philip Kan Gotanda, Lisa Ramirez, John Belluso, Caryl Churchill, Janusz Glowacki, Cheryl West, and many others at theatres including New York Theatre Workshop, The Public Theater, Vineyard Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Primary Stages, Guthrie Theater, Actors Theater of Louisville, Seattle Repertory, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Arena Stage, the Alley, and McCarter Theatre Center. She was associate director at La Jolla Playhouse for three years and resident director at Mark Taper Forum for 10 years. She is currently working on a new version of her musical adaptation of Virginia Woolf’s The Waves, music by David Bucknam and Adam Gwon (premiered at NYTW 1990 and New York Stage and Film 2018); The Song of Rome with Denis O’Hare, commission for the McCarter Theater; and The Idea of Order with composer Todd Almond, commissioned by Berkeley Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, and Seattle Rep.
Paul James Prendergast (Sound Designer) was the composer and sound designer on the 2016 production of *It Can’t Happen Here* and *Roe* at Berkeley Rep. His Broadway credits include *All the Way* and *The Great Society*. His regional credits include the Guthrie Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival (25 productions), Seattle Repertory Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum, South Coast Repertory, American Repertory Theater, PlayMakers Repertory Company, Hartford Stage, Great Lakes Theater Festival, Geffen Playhouse, Long Wharf Theatre, California Shakespeare Theater, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Utah Shakespeare Festival, the Kennedy Center, Alley Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, and American Conservatory Theater. He has also designed for theme parks, including Universal Studios, Disney, and Knott’s Berry Farm, and museums, including J. Paul Getty, Geffen Contemporary, and Autry Museum of Western Heritage. His dance credits include Diavolo Dance Theater, Momix, and Parsons Dance. Paul’s work as a singer/songwriter has appeared in films, on recordings, and in music venues nationwide.

The full cast for *It Can’t Happen Here*, in alphabetical order, includes:

- Elijah Alexander (General Edgeways/Bishop Prang/Lee Sarason)
- Danforth Comins (Philip Jessup)
- Scott Coopwood (Shad Ledue)
- William Thomas Hodgson (Dr. Fowler Greenhill)
- Anna Ishida (Mary Jessup Greenhill)
- David Kelly (Buzz Windrip)
- Sharon Lockwood (Emma Jessup/Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch)
- Eddie Lopez (David Greenhill/Mr. Dimick)
- Alex Lydon (Julian Falck)
- Tom Nelis (Buck Titus)
- Greta Oglesby (Lorinda Pike)
- Charles Shaw Robinson (Frank Tasbrough/Effingham Swan)
- Gerardo Rodriguez (Karl Pascal)
- Carolina Sanchez (Sissy Jessup)
- Mark Kenneth Smaltz (R.C. Crowley/John Pollikop)
- David Strathairn (Doremus Jessup)

Citizens, campaigners, soldiers, workers, radio voices, prisoners, and many others all played by members of the company and Sound Designer Paul James Prendergast.

**Broadcast Partners as of September 10, 2020**

Adams State University Theatre
Alley Theatre
American Conservatory Theater
American Stage Theatre Company
Arden Theatre Company
Arena Stage
Center Theatre Group
Columbia College Chicago Theatre Department
Cornell University Department of Performing and Media Arts
Custom Made Theatre Co.
Festival Playhouse of Kalamazoo College
Goodman Theatre
Guthrie Theater
Howard University Department of Theatre Arts
Indiana Repertory Theatre
Juneteenth Theatre Justice Project
Kansas City Repertory Theatre (KCRrep)
Other theatres wishing to participate can do so by filling out this [this form](#).

*It Can’t Happen Here* is made possible thanks to the generous support of sponsors **Barbara & Rodgin Cohen and Paul Haahr & Susan Karp.** Berkeley Rep also thanks its 2020-21 Season Sponsors: **BART, Peet’s Coffee, Bruce Golden & Michelle Mercer, Jack & Betty Schafer, and The Strauch Kulhanjian Family.**

**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.

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