From Storefront to Forefront
The history of Berkeley Repertory Theatre

1968-1980: Our College Years

1968
- Berkeley Rep is born when Michael Leibert stages Woyzeck at the International House on the UC Berkeley campus. He then rents a storefront on College Avenue and transforms it into an 85-seat theatre to remount the show, creating a home where the company will struggle, survive, and eventually thrive over the next 12 years.
- In December, Berkeley Rep's fourth production includes its first world premiere, a one-act play by John Chioles entitled Pigeon, Pigeor, which is staged alongside works by Beckett and O'Neill.

1969
- During the course of the year, Berkeley Rep demonstrates its eclectic intentions by producing the work of Euripides, Mailer, Molière, Saroyan, Wilde, and Williams.
- The company celebrates its first sold-out house during its hilarious run of The Miser.
- On College Avenue, Berkeley Rep builds a deck out back, calls it “our new outdoor theatre,” and begins presenting plays for children. Nonetheless, the theatre already proves too small, and Michael Leibert arranges to stage several shows downtown at the Florence Schwimley Theatre.
- Berkeley Rep launches its first education programs: a yearlong series of workshops for aspiring theatre professionals, a series of student matinees for high school groups, and a summer class for kids in Kenney Park, which is supported by a $500 grant from the City of Berkeley.

1970
- Berkeley Rep begins a long love affair with the Bard when Robert Mooney directs Twelfth Night. Presented in repertory with The Merry Wives of Windsor, the shows set attendance records—playing to 99 percent of capacity.
- As a result, Berkeley Rep breaks on through to the other side: by knocking out a wall between two storefronts, the Theatre expands to 153 seats. Even so, to enter on the far side of the stage, actors have to run outside, down an alley, and back into the building—and the dressing room is two flights up. Perhaps that’s why the performers occasionally seem out of breath when they appear on stage.
- The Theatre launches its first subscription campaign: five plays for $10.50. It’s two dollars more if you want to attend on Friday or Saturday night.
- The media begins to notice this scrappy little company: “San Franciscans loathe to make the half-hour trip ‘all the way over to Berkeley’ are depriving themselves of theatrical delights all too rare in these parts,” says San Francisco Magazine. “Berkeley Repertory Theatre has over the past two years, without Ford grants or daily dithyrambs in the local drama pages, assembled a wealth of acting, directing and producing talent that makes theatergoing a joy instead of the usual vague civic duty… Not just another amateur outfit of ‘promise’ or ‘potential,’ the Berkeley Repertory needs only an adequate, well-located theatre to command the attention they deserve.”

MORE
1971

- Peter Donat’s unusual adaptation of Aldous Huxley’s *The Devils* is hotter than – well, let’s just say it extends its run and goes on to play in Santa Cruz.
- People continue to flock to Berkeley Rep: “We have over 500 subscribers for this season already,” Leibert is quoted as saying, “The first year we had 20.”
- Critical acclaim continues to accrue as well. The *Independent* announces, “In these days of Nader’s Raiders and consumer advocacy, Berkeley Repertory Theatre deserves a ‘best buy’ rating... one of the best independent theatres around.”

1972

- Michael Leibert directs the Theatre’s first full-length world premiere, *For Promised Joy* by Gerry Carroll.
- Mitzi Sales begins 18 years as the company’s managing director, bringing a steady hand to the Theatre’s administration.
- Berkeley Rep advertises its summer production of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* as a festival of food, merriment, and flower children. “Rarely has a publicity blur been more truthful,” asserts the *Daily Review*.
- In November, Berkeley Rep is welcomed into the League of Resident Theatres, a national organization that helps negotiate union contracts for prominent nonprofit theatres.

1973

- Berkeley Rep’s “Summer of Shakespeare, Sheridan, and Shaw” proves immensely popular, and people begin to notice “that little theatre across the Bay.”
- Mitzi Sales establishes the summer internship program, which grows into one of the most thorough and prestigious training programs in the nation.
- In a special screening to benefit Berkeley Rep, renowned actor Michael Caine flies in for the local premiere of his film *Sleuth*.
- Berkeley Rep presents two West Coast premieres: Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Inspector Hound* and *Subject to Fits*, an audacious adaptation of *The Idiot* starring Tony nominee Penelope Windust. Some things never change: when the latter show opens, most people give it raves and ovations, while others walk out in consternation.

1974

- Berkeley Rep gets batty with the world premiere of *Dracula, A Musical Nightmare*, written by Associate Artistic Director Douglas Johnson and composed by John Aschenbrenner. The script not only has teeth, it has legs – and it goes on to productions in many cities.
- The *Pacific Sun* gives an early nod to the timeliness of the Theatre’s shows: “It was just coincidence that Berkeley Repertory Theatre opened its ebullient production of *Born Yesterday* on the day Richard Nixon resigned. But the parallels between Garson Kanin’s 1948 comedic diatribe against Washington corruption and today’s outfall of official sewage are striking.”
- Berkeley Rep receives a big boost with a $9,500 grant from the newly formed California Arts Commission.

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1975
- “Any doubts that Berkeley Repertory Theatre bit off more than it could politely chew in staging The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark in its intimate College Avenue hall are immediately relieved when a young actor named Joe Spano takes command of the proceedings,” proclaims the San Francisco Chronicle. Spano’s stunning portrayal of the title role brings national attention to the Theatre.
- Despite being almost four hours long, Leibert’s brilliant staging of The Iceman Cometh attracts rave reviews and sold-out houses.
- The company continues to strain against the theatrical limitations of its College Avenue storefront. Leibert asks set designer Gene Angell, an architect by day, to suggest ways to renovate the space–and begins a fundraising campaign for the expansion.

1976
- Berkeley Rep celebrates the bicentennial with an all-American season that features plays by Eugene O’Neill, John Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, and–yes–George M. Cohan.
- As part of the festivities, Johnson and Aschenbrenner team up for another world premiere. In the words of one critic, Yankee Doodle, A Myth with Music is “a gleeful cross between the Sonny and Cher Show and the live coverage of the SLA shootout in Los Angeles.”
- The Theatre enjoys its best year yet, and subscriptions increase 25 percent to 2,000.
- Private dinners prepared for opening night by local gourmand Narsai David become one of the precious perks of working at Berkeley Rep.

1977
- Berkeley Rep is solidly established in the community with 3,500 subscribers, a budget topping $200,000, a board of directors led by Helen Barber, and a new crew of volunteers dubbed the Backstagers. “They now sell out the 155-seat theatre for six of seven performances weekly,” reports the East Bay Review.
- The Theatre celebrates its tenth birthday with a season that features French and Italian farces, Shaw and O’Neill, and two world premieres–including Repi, a script created from interviews with the company by Emmy-winner Stanley Greenberg, author of the infamous Soylent Green.
- After many frustrating attempts to obtain grants, Berkeley Rep finally turns the tide. A flood of funding pours in from the City of Berkeley, Clorox, the East Bay Community Fund, the Hearst Foundation, the W.H. Hewlett Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Shubert Foundation, and other institutions. Many of these gifts support Berkeley Rep’s dream of a bigger theatre.
- The Backstagers begin a Berkeley Rep tradition by organizing talkbacks with the artists.

1978
- Berkeley Rep sadly accepts that it has outgrown its College Avenue home and buys a lot in downtown Berkeley. The board selects Gene Angell as the architect for the new building. “One month after we purchased the property,” Mitzi Sales recalls, “we laid outlines of the new facility in chalk on the ground, held a press conference, cut ribbons, and cried with fear, anticipation, and joy.”

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• That summer, the company takes the show on the road. By performing for audiences in Contra Costa and Napa, Berkeley Rep attracts new fans who join the growing ranks of its subscribers. “No one coughed. No one cleared his throat. No one fidgeted and squirmed in an attempt to find a more comfortable position. No one snoozed; no one even yawned,” the Contra Costa Times recounts. “In its debut at the Willows Theater in Concord, Berkeley Repertory Theatre mesmerized its audience.”

1979
• On June 11, Michael Leibert, Mitzi Sales, and Helen Barber don hard hats. They grab a gold-plated shovel and break ground on Berkeley Rep’s new home on Addison Street.
• Since the new theatre will help revitalize downtown, the Department of Housing and Urban Development provides a $300,000 grant to the City of Berkeley to help fund its construction. This is the first time that a city is given one of HUD’s Urban Development Action Grants to support an arts organization. In return, Berkeley Rep agrees to provide 200 free tickets every year to Berkeley High School for student matinees, a practice which continues today.
• The Theatre also receives $250,000 from the Mark Taper Foundation for the project, and a $120,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
• In the last season on College Avenue, 75 percent of seats are sold to subscribers. But, with bills piling up for the new theatre, times are tight. As the San Francisco Chronicle writes, “Leibert reveals the design budget for the show, and I have trouble, from my back seat, controlling my astonishment: $250 for the entire set design! $250 for all the circus costumes! $15 for props!”

1980
• With the support of the local community, Berkeley Rep opens the 400-seat Thrust Stage, where its reputation steadily grows over the next two decades.
• With only 11 rows and no seat more than 38 feet from the stage—the Theatre retains the intimacy of the College Avenue space, but the company enjoys unheard-of luxuries such as a rehearsal hall, costume shop, scene shop, office space, and a second dressing room. Plus, the actors aren’t out of breath when they enter stage left.
• For their part, theatregoers appreciate a spacious lobby, bigger restrooms, a nearby BART stop, and—best of all—comfortable, assigned seats. The Thrust is the first theatre on the West Coast to offer a Sennheiser listening system for patrons with hearing impairments.
• A gala—catered by Narsai’s—celebrates the opening of the building. Edward Albee and Mark Taper are among the guests, along with many artists from the early years.
• Berkeley Rep inaugurates the new space with a visionary production of Galileo, which sells out every performance. But of equal importance is the final show on College Avenue: when the American Theatre Critics Association meets in San Francisco, Berkeley Rep rents a bus and impresses reviewers from across the country with What the Butler Saw.
• If you build it, they will come: in the Theatre’s first year on Addison Street, subscriptions leap 300 percent from 3,700 to 11,000. Berkeley Rep has definitely entered the big leagues.

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1981-1990: A Decade of Change

1981

- Over the course of the year, as if to demonstrate the company’s versatility, audiences experience the work of Alan Ayckbourn, Anton Chekhov, Michael Christopher, William Luce, David Mamet, William Saroyan, William Shakespeare, and George Bernard Shaw— but, honestly, Berkeley Rep spends that first season just figuring out how to use this shiny, new theatre.
- That spring, the wisteria is planted in the courtyard, which is christened the Mark Geiger Theatre Garden in honor of the actor who died in a backpacking accident. The walls are covered in clever epigrams—including messages from Richard Pryor and Buddy Ebsen—because more than 1,000 people engraved their best wishes in the Buy A Brick campaign that helped fund the new building.
- Over the next several decades, the intimacy of the Thrust Stage makes it a favorite home for solo performers—and Joy Carlin gets the ball rolling with *The Belle of Amherst*. Her depiction of Emily Dickinson is so popular that the show returns the following year before departing on a statewide tour.
- Berkeley Rep introduces post-show discussions for each play with members of the creative team, and the Backstagers set up a gift stand where theatre fans can buy T-shirts, mugs, and more.
- The board of directors announces that overwhelming community response allowed it to meet the NEA challenge grant by more than four to one—two years ahead of schedule! It also welcomes Edward Albee, Sir John Gielgud, and S. Mark Taper as honorary trustees.
- Eight days after an arsonist destroys the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco, Berkeley Rep hosts an all-star benefit for the company led by a young director named Anthony Taccone. The event features four hours of performances by actors from both theatres, as well as the Blake Street Hawkeyes, George Coates Performance Works, and the Pickle Family Circus.

1982

- In an international exchange that presages the multicultural programming of the future, Berkeley Rep hosts the Market Theatre of South Africa. “Woza Albert! is an unforgettable experience,” raves Bay City News. “Rooted in the realities of racial apartheid in South Africa, the play is consummate political theater, at the same time that it is so powerfully incantatory that it recalls the origins of drama in magic and mystery.”
- The Thrust Stage is also ahead of its time. Due to Gene Angell’s sensitive plans, it wins the California Contest for Accessible Design. Even the catwalks above the stage are wheelchair-accessible!
- Tony Amendola makes his directorial debut with *Savages*, a docudrama by Christopher Hampton. Berkeley Rep’s first venture into this genre nets it numerous awards.
- The Theatre initiates Playworks, a series of staged readings to develop new scripts. The project fosters writers such as Lee Blessing, Don Nigro, Tony Press-Coffman, and Helena Worthen.
- That summer, thanks to Narsil’s Restaurant, the Noel Coward Festival offers a full feast for the senses, including gourmet picnic baskets for only $7.50. “Berkeley Rep’s doors will open one and a half hours before show-time when patrons may dine in the courtyard,” reports the *Daily Republic*. “The picnic baskets include such delightful edibles as duck liver *pate*, *pate maison*, French garlic sausage, Italian salami, pasta salad, dolmas, and marinated vegetable salad.” *Bon appetit*!

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1983

- Berkeley Rep pioneers the concept of co-productions, teaming up with Milwaukee Repertory Theater to present a "powerful and excruciating" American Buffalo that is "tough enough to offend audiences in both cities," according to the Oakland Tribune.
- After 15 years at the helm, Michael Leibert leaves the company. Joy Carlin serves as acting artistic director for the next 20 months.
- That summer, renowned clown Geoff Hoyle sidles into Berkeley Rep's season for the first time. "I have not laughed so long or so hard since I was 15 years old," writes Nancy Scott in the Examiner. "Every kind of laugh. The whoop. The chortle. The small gurgle. The large snort. The ho, ho. The hee, hee. And the vast convulsion that makes the stomach muscles ache for two days."
- A grant from the Gerbode Foundation helps Berkeley Rep give birth to Lives in the Theatre, a series of talks with luminaries in the field. Christopher Durang leads off, since he's here for rehearsals of Beyond Therapy. Other icons quickly follow, including Edward Albee, Herbert Berghof, Ellen Burstyn, Brendan Gill, and Uta Hagen.
- Cheerio! Berkeley Rep organizes its first theatre tour of London. Eager travelers enjoy shows at the Bristol Old Vic, Lyric Hammersmith, the National Theatre, and beyond.
- In December, Douglas Johnson – who has become a familiar face in commercials for Black & Decker, Burger King, and Sony – returns to Berkeley Rep to stage the American premiere of Season's Greetings.

1984

- Two indelible performances kick off a year dominated by powerful women: Judith Marx in the title role of Filumena and Joy Carlin as Margaret Fuller in The Margaret Ghost, a world premiere by Carole Braverman developed in the Playworks program.
- The theme continues when, after an extensive nationwide search, the board selects Sharon Ott as the Theatre's new artistic director. Based in Milwaukee, the young director has already worked in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle, as well as Europe and Japan. She brings her focus on new plays and diverse voices to Berkeley Rep.
- "If this is boring, we can just leave in the middle," the woman seated next to me said to her companion, not knowing any better than the rest of us what to expect from a Berkeley Repertory Theatre attempt to perform a Greek classic drama in a traditional Japanese style," Robert Hurwitt writes in the Express. "As the last tableau of Shozo Sato's Kabuki Medea was enfolded in a final blackout, the two women were still in their seats, joining in the enthusiastic ovation that swept through the house. Opening night of Kabuki Medea was simply a triumph... The result is the most racially mixed cast (and, gratifyingly, the most integrated opening night audience) I've ever seen at the Rep."
- Berkeley Rep enters the information age: a $50,000 grant from the James Irvine Foundation allows the Theatre to computerize its administrative functions.
- However, the year ends on a somber note. In October, with deep grief, the company mourns the passing of Michael Leibert – the visionary who, as the Los Angeles Times declares, built Berkeley Rep "from an idea to a $2 million showplace."

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1985

- Berkeley Rep rocks the house with Sam Shepard’s *The Tooth of Crime*, which is so successful it’s remounted in the summer.
- To the delight of some and the bewilderment of others, Sharon Ott employs colorblind casting for her production of *Kingdom Come*. Talented actors of different races work together to portray a community of Norwegian farmers.
- Berkeley Rep insists that the Bay Area return to the scene of the crime with *Execution of Justice*, a riveting docudrama about the assassination of George Moscone and Harvey Milk. A co-production with San Jose Repertory Theatre, this searing show is staged by Oskar Eustis and Tony Taccone, two directors from the Eureka Theatre whose careers are on the rise.
- In a challenging economic era, Berkeley Rep receives crucial funding from the Fleishhacker Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, Mellon Foundation, and the Reader’s Digest Dance and Theatre Program.
- Thanks to the gift shop, the fine restaurant raffle, and other events, the Backstagers top $100,000 in their contributions to Berkeley Rep. "Our members spend hundreds of hours working for the Theatre – activities ranging from stuffing envelopes to working on costumes to meeting visiting artists at the airports."
- *Misalliance*, *The Playboy of the Western World*, *Tartuffe*... The year had its share of classics, but it concludes with two thrilling new plays: *In the Belly of the Beast* by Jack Henry Abbott and *The Art of Dining* by Tina Howe.

1986

- Berkeley Rep is more popular than ever. To accommodate demand, the Theatre adds an extra week to the run of each production.
- Since it can’t put more shows in a sold-out theatre – and since its ambition outstrips the technical capacity of the Thrust Stage – Berkeley Rep begins presenting in other venues as well. Over the next 15 years, the company performs throughout Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco – awaiting the day when it will have a second stage of its own.
- Meanwhile, to provide more space for the scene shop, Berkeley Rep rents a nearby warehouse which formerly housed rehearsals for Creedence Clearwater Revival. The company’s artisans build sets here for 19 years.
- Berkeley Rep continues to spread its wings by introducing the parallel season – shows with limited runs and unlimited vision. When Richard E.T. White starts things off by staging *Hard Times*, the *East Bay Express* jokes, "Tickets for its brief run were harder to come by than an honest man in the White House."
- Berkeley Rep, the Eureka, and San Jose Rep join forces again in June to produce *The Normal Heart*. Oscar-nominee Larry Kramer, the founder of Gay Men’s Health Crisis, penned this controversial play about the AIDS epidemic.
- The following month, in another stunning look at life inside South Africa, the Market Theatre returns with *Asinamali!* *(We Have No Money!).*
- Finally, at a time when schools face budget cuts for art classes, Berkeley Rep expands its education and outreach activities for Bay Area children. The Theatre already provides student matinees, backstage tours, teacher handbooks, and more. Now it launches an annual touring show, which sends professional actors and superb scripts to local schools for two decades.

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1987

- “Berkeley Rep is at the peak of its new golden era,” proclaims the San Francisco Posi. The Theatre throws a gala to celebrate the start of its 20th season – and it has a lot to celebrate...
- In July, Berkeley Rep moves its first show to Manhattan: Hard Times plays off Broadway to sold-out houses, and the New York Times calls it “exciting and witty theater.”
- At home, the company reaches its goal of 15,000 subscribers before the season even begins.
- To commemorate the approaching centennial of Eugene O’Neill’s birth, the Theatre stages three of his masterpieces simultaneously. In an incredible contrast, Long Day’s Journey into Night and Ah, Wilderness! play in repertory on the Thrust Stage while the company also presents The Hairy Ape in San Francisco. George Ferencz directs the company’s first foray across the Bay, and jazz giant Max Roach contributes an extraordinary score.
- The parallel season is “on the cutting edge of international theater,” according to the Oakland Tribune. That’s because Berkeley Rep and Cal Performances invite legendary director Tadashi Suzuki to bring his Clytemnestra to Zellerbach Hall. Even though it’s entirely in Japanese, it sells out the 2,000-seat auditorium.
- Sharon Ott and Timothy Near co-direct a production of Brecht’s The Good Person of Szechuan with deaf actress Freda Norman in the title role. “It epitomized what risk-taking in theater is all about,” exclaims the Examiner.
- Oh, and that opening night gala? It closes down Addison Street, and theatre lovers raise a record $39,000 for the Theatre as they dance beneath the stars.

1988

- After staging popular productions of The Birthday Party in ’86 and The Rivals in ’87, Tony Taccone joins the staff as associate artistic director. “I’m thrilled to be going to the Rep,” he says. “I plan on it being a long-term relationship.”
- Craig Lucas and Norman René stage Prelude to a Kiss at Berkeley Rep, preparing it for an off-Broadway run. The play features an unknown actress named Mary-Louise Parker, who earns a career-launching Tony nomination when Kiss graduates to Broadway. Her Berkeley co-star, Sydney Walker, doesn’t travel to New York – but he reprises his role on film with Alec Baldwin and Meg Ryan.
- In March, Philip Kan Gotanda begins a long association with the Theatre when Sharon Ott directs the world premiere of Yankee Dawg You Die – “a significant step in the Rep’s development of a multi-ethnic identity,” according to the East Bay Express. The show extends its Berkeley run and transfers to the Los Angeles Theatre Center.
- The multicultural mood continues in May with the West Coast premiere of The Tale of Lea. After the success of Clytemnestra, Tadashi Suzuki took actors from four American theatres – including three from Berkeley Rep – to “theatrical boot camp” in Japan. Their Lear plays in California, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Washington, DC, drawing prominent praise from the New Republic, Time, and the Wall Street Journal, which calls it “hypnotic... the most ambitious crosscultural event yet undertaken by America’s regional theaters.”
- To top it off, Berkeley Rep presents the West Coast premiere of Sophiatown with the Oakland Ensemble Theatre. “The government lets groups like ours out of the country because it wants to give the world the impression that everything is OK in South Africa,” Ramalao Makhene tells the SF Bay Guardian. “We take advantage of that by saying loudly that nothing is OK at home. What we speak, what we eat, how we live – all these things are not working.”

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1989

- Berkeley Rep begins the Bridge to the Future, a campaign to retire outstanding debt from construction of the Thrust, start planning for a second stage, and support development of new plays. It gets off to an auspicious start with a $325,000 challenge grant from the NEA.

- In May, Berkeley Rep sends yet another hit to Manhattan: *Yankee Dawg You Die* generates glowing reviews when it descends on Playwrights Horizons.

- In October, due to a seismic shakeup in everyone's schedule, the Theatre delays the opening of *Reckless*—but, as the *San Francisco Examiner* sighs, the comedy turns out to be "the perfect post-earthquake play." Loma Prieta does little damage to Berkeley Rep's facilities, but the company holds a benefit performance for a less fortunate A.C.T.

- The company's touring shows visit 24,000 students in 62 schools. "Judging from the way they devoured the 50-minute performance—wth rapt attention ordinarily reserved for General Hospital and enthusiastic applause worthy of a Run DMC concert—the students were obviously starved [for] a full-course arts event," the *Oakland Tribune* observes.

- In December, Berkeley Rep tests itself on a larger stage—and causes concern that the company may move—when it presents *The Winter's Tale* at the Kaiser Center in Oakland. Although the run is only three weeks long, the show draws a record 23,000 patrons. It also attracts $52,000 in underwriting from Oakland corporations, more than double the total for any previous show.

- The Bridge to the Future gets closer to its goal with two major gifts: a $150,000 grant from the James Irvine Foundation and a $200,000 grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

1990

- Berkeley Rep receives its first AT&T Onstage Award to support the world premiere of *Each Day Dies with Sleep.* The script calls for 10,000 unmatched socks, which the company solicits from local folks who are unlucky in laundry. When the show transfers to New York, all those Berkeley socks make their off-Broadway debut.

- After 18 years as managing director, Mitzi Sales leaves Berkeley Rep. In her tenure, the company has become a $3.6-million organization with an annual audience of 150,000. She turns over the reins to experienced theatre administrator Susan Medak.

- The plays picked for the year indicate how the eighties transformed the Theatre. In addition to Shakespeare and Shaw, Berkeley Rep's programming includes Latin artists like Culture Clash, José Rivera, and Lope de Vega; black artists like Barney Simon and Charles Smith; young writers like Quincy Long and Keith Reddin; and four female directors: Roberta Levitow, Irene Lewis, Phyllis S.K. Look, and Sharon Ott.

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• “Nelson Mandela’s West Coast visit this weekend could hardly be better heralded than by *Born in the RSA*, a play about the 1986 State of Emergency in the Republic of South Africa playing at Berkeley Repertory Theatre,” *USA Today* announces. “This Orwellian nightmare suggests 1984 was a romp compared to 1986.”

• When Berkeley Rep presents *Man and Superman* – including the notorious Don Juan scene – the show lasts nearly four hours. Nonetheless, as the *Contra Costa Times* points out, “People were so frantic to get tickets that they stood in line morning after morning, hoping for cancellations.”

• The decade ends on a worrisome – but familiar – note: “The entire country is fretting about the price tag of our military adventures in the Persian Gulf and the fiscal repercussions of the savings and loan debacle,” the *SF Bay Guardian* opines. “Nearly everyone in the theater – from avant-garde soloists to resident mainstream companies to commercial producers – is holding a collective breath over the future of the National Endowment for the Arts. Will we have any federal arts funding after Congress debates the NEA appropriation bill this month?”

• But there is a silver lining... Thanks to a deal arranged by the city, Berkeley Rep purchases another three properties on Addison Street – the future home of the Roda Theatre.

### 1991-1997: Taking the National Stage

**1991**

• Even as *Angels in America* is still being developed across the Bay, Berkeley Rep welcomes a little known 34-year-old named Tony Kushner. *The Illusion* “confirms Kushner’s promise as one of the USA’s most politically eloquent writers,” asserts *USA Today*, and Sharon Ott’s production commences the Theatre’s long partnership with this remarkable writer.

• When George C. Wolfe brings Zora Neale Hurston’s *Spunk* to Berkeley, it breaks attendance records and becomes the first show in Berkeley Rep history to sell more than $100,000 in single tickets. “It’s a one-of-a-kind, dynamic, sell-the-car-or-hock-the-heirlooms, must-see experience,” raves the *East Bay Express*.

• Subscriptions to Berkeley Rep’s Parallel Season double, hitting 2,500. Adventurous theatregoers enjoy the world premiere of Phillip Kan Gotanda’s *Fish Head Soup* in repertory with John O’Keefe’s hallucinogenic *Vic*.

• Berkeley Rep adds two full-time employees to its staff to focus entirely on education and outreach for local youth. They arrange backstage tours, discounted tickets, post-show discussions, slide shows, student matinees, study guides, teacher in-services, and visiting artists for local classrooms.

**1992**


• Tony Taccone’s production of *The Convict’s Return* is so successful that it earns an encore run in San Francisco before heading off to Chicago, Phoenix, Seattle, and Lowell, MA.


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• Renowned director Mark Wing-Davey transports audiences to Romania with the unforgettable West Coast premiere of _Mad Forest_ by Caryl Churchill.

• The _San Francisco Chronicle_ reports “a lot more elbow room” for Berkeley Rep: with a $1.2 million purchase agreement, the company triples its square-footage and draws closer to its dream of a second theatre by acquiring the auto-body shop adjacent to its home on Addison Street.

1993

• After co-directing the world premiere of _Angels in America_, Tony Taccone returns to Berkeley Rep with _Volpone_. This wild show — in a new adaptation by Joan Holden — features hilarious comedians such as Geoff Hoyle, Sharon Lockwood, and John O’Keefe alongside a snake-charmer, a dwarf, and two musicians in leather jock straps.

• The season also showcases two other premieres: Swedish actress Juni Dahr stars in a new translation of _The Lady from the Seaby_ Henrik Ibsen, and Berkeley Rep brings back folk legend Ronnie Gilbert to debut _Mother Jones_.

• When ordering tickets for _Dancing at Lughnasa_, patrons ask for everything from “Dancing with Lasagna” to “Laughing at Lufthansa.” Nonetheless, Brian Friel’s Tony Award-winning play sets a new attendance record at Berkeley Rep.

• “Recession? What recession?” asks the _San Francisco Chronicle_. “The recession seems to have passed by the Berkeley Rep season-ticket campaign, which has already met a budget of selling 16,000 of 21,000 available seats for each mainstage show.”

1994

• The Lila Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund honors Berkeley Rep with a $1.5 million grant, allowing it to engage in extensive outreach to culturally diverse communities.

• The funds permit the Theatre to experiment with new programming such as the world premiere of _The Woman Warrior_ by Maxine Hong Kingston, the West Coast premiere of Phillip Kan Gotanda’s _Day Standing on its Head_, the West Coast premiere of Jessica Hagedorn and Han Ong’s _Airport Music_, and the world premiere of Tan Dun’s _Soundshape I_, one of the first concert works in the United States by this noted composer.

• Sharon Ott’s sumptuous production of _The Woman Warrior_ posts a new attendance record, welcoming an incredible 35,000 viewers. The show transfers to Boston and Los Angeles, and _USA Today_ declares it the best new play of the year.

• Anna Deavere Smith sets the Bay Area ablaze with her historic solo show _Fires in the Mirror_, the first production in Berkeley Rep’s history to sell every ticket before it opens. The _SF Weekly_ “recalls driving by the Rep at 7 AM and seeing folks camped out like Deadheads in hopes of landing seats.”

• Theatre de la Jeune Lune comes to Berkeley Rep for the first time and receives rapturous reviews for the world premiere of _Don Juan Giovann_ , which features five actors, five singers, six musicians, and a shiny Chevy convertible.

• With seats to these shows selling like hot crepes, the board of trustees votes to move forward with plans for a second stage.

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1995

- Two talented directors return. Stephen Wadsworth’s production of *An Ideal Husband* extends for three weeks and sets yet another box-office record, while Mark Wing-Davey stages a rocking Restoration play called *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. “At Berkeley Rep, Beaux knows romantic comedy,” jokes the *Contra Costa Times*.

- When the company commissions *Ballad of Yachiyo* by Philip Kan Gotanda, it lands another AT&T: Onstage Award, becoming the only theatre to earn this honor four times. Sharon Ott’s production— which the *Village Voice* proclaims “mesmerizing”— journeys to Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle.

- Another commission, the world premiere of *Geni(Us)*, celebrates the ongoing collaboration between Tony Taccone and “Clown Prince” Geoff Hoyle.

- After a decade in which it introduced more than 180,000 students to professional theatre, Berkeley Rep’s school tour celebrates its tenth anniversary with a production of *The Yellow Boat*. “That was the first play I watched and didn’t get bored,” declares a sixth-grade boy at Malcolm X Intermediate School. “If I had a chance I would watch this play until I get old.”

- In December, Berkeley Rep kicks off Page to Stage, a series of talks with eminent theatre artists that proves enormously popular in the years to come.

1996

- Sharon Ott’s all-star production of *Heartbreak House* “serves as a stunning example of how far the company has come in the 13 years since Ott became its artistic director,” raves the *San Francisco Examiner*. “As our nation drifts into higher-tech aerial warfare than even the prescient Shaw could have imagined, the heartbreak of his magnificent *House* feels more timely than ever.”

- Renowned director Mary Zimmerman makes her first visit to Berkeley Rep with the West Coast premiere of *Journey to the West*. The *Contra Costa Times* calls it “a must-see production that confirms the Rep’s position as the premiere theatrical company in the Bay Area.”

- Sharon Ott shatters the attendance record yet again when she stages Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. The production tours to Boston, Houston, New Haven, Seattle, and Washington, DC, where it culminates in a performance at Ford’s Theatre for President Clinton and Vice President Gore.

- “Rude! Nude! But it’s superb!” exclaims the *Marin Independent Journal* when Berkeley Rep presents Terrence McNally’s latest play, *Love! Valour! Compassion!*. This year also sees the West Coast premieres of *Missing Persons* by Craig Lucas and *Changes of Heart* by Marivaux, another classic revived by Stephen Wadsworth.

- Mayor Shirley Dean places Measure S on the ballot— and Berkeley voters approve it— ensuring that the City can contribute more than $4 million to the construction of a new theatre on Addison Street.

1997

- Like most of us, the Theatre sees some big changes when it turns 30...

- In recognition of its place on the national stage, Berkeley Rep is honored with the prestigious Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. The company also earns the Cyril Award for Non-Profit Arts Excellence from San Francisco’s Chamber of Commerce.

(MORE)
• Sharon Ott steps down as artistic director and, after beating back candidates from across the nation, Tony Taccone is appointed to the post. He takes the reins of a $5.5-million organization with 16,000 subscribers.

• According to the Contra Costa Times, his production of Pentecost is “a stadium-clearing grand slam. Taccone, the new artistic director of Berkeley Repertory Theatre, said he wanted to start his first season with a bang. And that’s just what he did with this spine-tingling, spellbinding thriller by David Edgar.”

• The Theatre also presents the world premiere of Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop, a solo show from a young artist named Danny Hoch. Directed by Jo Bonney, this phenomenal piece reaches 45 American cities before becoming a film.

• Yet, without a doubt, the sentimental favorite of the season is Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years. Written by Emily Mann and directed by Roberta Levitow, this heartwarming play about two African-American seniors garners rave reviews and a three-week extension.

1998-2008: To Broadway and Beyond

1998

• “Paula Vogel’s ’97 off-Broadway hit How I Learned to Drive careens westward for its first production outside of New York City,” the SF Weekly says. Directed by Molly Smith and co-produced with Magic Theater, “the story between girl and uncle works a slow, tortuous seduction on our feelings.”

• In February, the Thrust Stage hosts five sold-out shows on the same day! Alicia in Wonder Tierra caps its tour of local schools with two public performances at 10 AM and noon; Danny Hoch gets ready for off Broadway by reprising Jails, Hospitals & Hip Hop at 2 PM and 10 PM; and How I Learned to Drive gives its final performance at 8 PM. According to Play by Play, “In front of the theatre, in the lobby, in the courtyard, audiences commingled as one group exited buzzing from the auditorium and the other met and mingled in anticipation of seeing their show.”

• That demonstrates the necessity of the company’s next move: “Berkeley Repertory Theatre, long a captive of its own success in a 40-seat thrust theater, broke through to the future yesterday,” the San Francisco Chronicle announces on October 27. “The company unveiled plans for a new 600-seat, $17.5 million proscenium theater that will swell audience capacity, expand artistic range and permit extended runs of hit shows.”

• But there’s more to this place than just a stage... After intense rehearsals for Hydriotaphia, Tony Kushner declares, “The staff at Berkeley Rep are the platonic ideal of a theatre staff.”

• To end the year, the School of Theatre hosts its first poetry slam for local teens. As the Berkeley High Jacket reports, “It was 100 minutes of pure rule-breaking, earth-shaking emotion and energy.”

(MORE)
1999

• As one viewer jokes, Berkeley Rep welcomes the approach of Y2K with tales from “YoK.” Before taking it to Broadway and winning a Tony Award, Mary Zimmerman enchants local audiences with the West Coast premiere of a luminous play based on the writings of Ovid. The East Bay Express exclaims, “After an immersion in the fluid, strange, and wonderful world of Zimmerman’s Metamorphoses, it feels as if these stories will never be the same again – and neither will we.”

• More magic unfolds when Mabou Mines mixes a single actress, a six-piece band, and seven puppeteers into its Obie-winning interpretation of Peter Pan. The Oakland Tribune proclaims, “Peter and Wendy is the most enthralling and entrancingly beautiful bedtime story you’re ever likely to see.”

• This emphasis on adventurous work continues with three world premieres. Tony Taccone directs both The First 100 Years by Geoff Hoyle and Rinde Eckert’s solo opera, Ravenshead, while the school tour presents Anne Galjour’s new play The Queen of the Sea.

• At the annual Narsai Toast, Berkeley Rep announces two major gifts to its Campaign for Expansion: a $750,000 challenge grant from the Kresge Foundation and an anonymous donation of $1 million.

• Crews complete demolition of the building next door in May and break ground on the new theatre on August 10. As construction continues, a webcam provides live footage of the process. Improvements on the website also make it possible to purchase tickets online for the first time.

• In September, Mark Wing-Davey directs a dazzling look at The Life of Galileo. “It’s fitting that this play returns at a time when many of us are bemused by another age – as yet unnamed – which will open with the dawning of the next millennium. Will the 2000s be a new Age of Reason? Or an Age of Repression?” asks the Contra Costa Times. “Galileo is also a good choice for sentimental reasons. The play opened the Rep’s Addison Street theater in 1980. Bringing it back now, as the theater prepares to open its new and larger space adjacent to its current location, provides a nice link between two notable stages in the Rep’s development.”

• In November, Berkeley Rep introduces the Bay Area to a hot, young playwright named Martin McDonagh with a “spectacular” production of The Beauty Queen of Leenane. “Theater should always be this good,” asserts CitySearch, one of many new entertainment guides in cyberspace.

• Clearly the San Francisco Examiner agrees. In December, it dubs Berkeley Rep “Bay Area Theatre of the Decade…for continuing excitement and consistent quality.”

2000

• Tony Taccone bursts the dot-com bubble by reviving a satire from 1610 with Joan Holden’s new adaptation of The Alchemist. “Jonson’s satire isn’t just timeless,” observes the San Francisco Chronicle. “It’s almost weirdly precocious about our own era of wildly inflated dreams.”

• To reinforce this tale about con artists, Berkeley Rep sells raffle tickets in the lobby and promises to put the winner’s name on the new theatre – for only a dollar. Really, we swear. (But buyer beware!)

• In a real-life story of high-tech philanthropy, the Ask Jeeves Foundation commits $3 million to the Campaign for Expansion. Its founder, Roger Strauch, remarks, “Berkeley Rep appealed to us because of its shared values with the dot-com culture: a commitment to excellence, risk-taking, and innovation.”

(MORE)
• And the good news continues: at a press conference in mid-July, Berkeley Rep announces plans to open yet another building on the other side of the Thrust Stage. The historic Golden Sheaf Bakery will become a new education center, thanks to the generosity of developer Avi Nevo.
• In September, the Theatre introduces half-price tickets for folks under 30 – a policy that generates enormous growth in attendance by young people during this decade.
• Then Theatre de la Jeune Lune returns, flying in for the West Coast premiere of The Green Bird. After seeing the show’s singing apples, grouchy statues, and giant puppets, the East Bay Expresswonders, “How can a $40-million special effects movie look so cheap, and this play’s effects be so classy?”
• And Richard Seyd stages Dinner with Friends, the Theatre’s third production with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Donald Margulies. Discussing this dramatic dissection of divorce, the Mercury News notes, “On opening night, many could be heard murmuring at the turns in the plot and squirming at the authenticity of it all.”

2001
• Berkeley Rep greets the new millennium by unveiling two new buildings: the state-of-the-art Roda Theatre and the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre. These additions transform a single stage into a vital and versatile performing arts complex, the linchpin of a bustling Downtown Arts District that helps revitalize Berkeley.
• The triumph also signals the culmination of a record fundraising effort: the Campaign for Expansion raised more than $20 million with the generous support of over 2,000 donors.
• Berkeley Rep christens the new theatre with the oldest work in the Western tradition: Tony Taccone and Stephen Wadsworth’s epic production of The Oresteia is not only the first to grace the Roda’s stage, it’s the first time Robert Fagles’ translation is performed in its entirety.
• Next door, on the Thrust Stage, audiences enjoy the West Coast premiere of Big Love, which is based on another tragedy by Aeschylus. But in the hands of Charles L. Mee, it becomes a “goony, intense and weirdly irresistible battle of the sexes,” the San Francisco Chronicle says. The play introduces Berkeley audiences to director Les Waters, who wins an Obie Award with Mee when Big Love moves to New York.
• This thematic exploration of love, justice, and community continues in May with the West Coast premiere of The Laramie Project. Tectonic Theatre’s docudrama about the murder of Matthew Shepard stature audiences and sets new box-office records. Berkeley Rep’s production features the original cast, some of whom must miss a few performances to film the movie in Wyoming.
• “There’s an old saying that goes, ‘The show must go on.’ And so it does,” observes the Oakland Tribune. On September 12, 2001, “Tony Taccone addressed Wednesday’s opening-night audience in the new Roda Theatre. He said that, in light of the week’s catastrophic events, he and his staff debated whether to proceed with the season opener, the world premiere of Naomi Iizuka’s 36 Views. ‘When there is a great tragedy, the theater can provide shelter, a safe haven,’ Taccone said. ‘We present this production with respect for the gravity of the situation and the full hope that it might illumine your heart and lift your spirit. That’s what we need, all of us.’”
• During the run, Berkeley Rep’s patrons contribute more than $15,000 to the Red Cross for disaster relief in New York and Washington, DC.
• Yet even with its new buildings and hit shows, the Theatre is not immune to the times. “Berkeley Rep has made a six-percent cut in its $9 million annual budget,” the Contra Costa Times reports in December. “Financially battered more by the disintegration of the dot-com empire than the events of Sept. 11, East Bay theaters are looking toward the future with uncertainty.”

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2002

- Before Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* even opens, the West Coast premiere of this prescient play about Afghanistan extends for two weeks. Then it adds three more weeks! Ultimately it sells more tickets and earns more money than any show in Berkeley Rep's history.
- "In the recent flood of conspicuous patriotism, it's been sobering to note how many voices of dissent have become eerily silent. Fortunately, Culture Clash is not among them," the *SF Bay Guardian* acknowledges. Tony Taccone's world premiere of *Culture Clash in AmeriCCa* "couldn't be more timely... the group's take-no-prisoners satire is welcome in these reticent times."
- Aside from these hits, however, it's a tough year. Illnesses cause actors to withdraw from two shows, another production sees its premiere delayed by a power outage, and several runs end early due to declining ticket sales in the dour economy.
- Yet every cloud has a silver lining: "When one of the lead actors in Berkeley Repertory Theatre's season-opening production of *The House of Blue Leaves* became ill and left the show a day before it was scheduled to open, [Jeri Lynn] Cohen stepped in and saved the day," the *Oakland Tribune* applauds. "Cohen performed in front of the press -- still clutching her script like a security blanket -- and won unanimous praise from the critics."
- During the year, the School of Theatre convenes the Teen Council and begins the Family Series, free monthly theatre classes sponsored by Target. Berkeley Rep also introduces night/OUT, a popular post-show party for the LGBT community.

2003

- Berkeley Rep pledges to commission dozens of new plays by 2013. The seed money for this bold initiative – an $800,000 grant by the Leading National Theatre Program – comes from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
- As part of this effort, the Theatre adds a champion of new work to its staff, appointing Les Waters as associate artistic director.
- Berkeley Rep and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival team up for the world premiere of *Continental Divide*, two "breathtakingly timely" plays by David Edgar about a bitterly contested gubernatorial election. In an incredible coincidence, the shows open in Berkeley one day after the inauguration of Arnold Schwarzenegger. "In this climate, *Continental Divide* is theater as salt lick," quips the *New York Times*. "It's irresistible. You lap it up."
- "We might easily call this the Season of Fearless Women," Tony Taccone proposes in the program. Rave reviews for three shows prove him right: Randy Danson and Michelle Duffy duel it out in Waters’ steamy production of *Suddenly Last Summer*; Francesca Faridany astonishes the critics by translating, adapting, and playing *Fräulein Else*; and Sarah Jones earns a two-week extension for the West Coast premiere of her spellbinding show, *Surface Transi*.
- Then Anne Nelson's poignant look at the events of 9/11, *The Guys*, drops by. Joe Spano makes a long overdue homecoming as part of the rotating cast, which also showcases Keith David, Wanda De Jesus, Dan Lauria, Sharon Lawrence, Jimmy Smits, and Lorraine Toussaint.
- The Theatre launches Teen Night, which quickly becomes a tradition. Local high-school students love the opportunity to see shows at a discount and meet the artists over dinner.
- The School of Theatre also organizes the first Teen One-Acts Festival, an annual event in which young playwrights see their scripts performed, produced, and directed by their peers.
- Finally, in November, Mary Zimmerman cracks the da Vinci code. Berkeley Rep co-produces a bicoastal run of *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* with Second Stage Theatre in Manhattan.

(MORE)
2004

- “Tony Taccone’s production got the transatlantic transfer it deserved,” cheers the London Times when Berkeley Rep and OSF embark on the first international tour in either company’s history. In David Edgar’s native England, Continental Divide plays a week at Birmingham Repertory Theatre and two weeks at the Barbican in London.
- On this side of the pond, Ellen McLaughlin—who portrayed Hedda Gabler at Berkeley Rep in 1988—returns for Ibsen’s Ghosts. She gives “a performance of such heartbreaking depth, distraught honesty and ferocious abandon that it elevates an already superb production into a stunning, immediate and unforgettable masterpiece,” says the San Francisco Chronicle.
- It must be a year for divas—because Rita Moreno makes her first appearance at Berkeley Rep as Maria Callas in Master Class. “She rules the stage,” raves the Mercury News. “It takes a legend to play a legend.”
- Les Waters teams up with a promising young playwright for the West Coast premiere of Eurydice. At the end of Sarah Ruhl’s tender show, as Orpheus endures a downpour while searching for his wife, there isn’t a dry eye in the house.
- Then a lost play from Zora Neale Hurston comes to life in the Roda Theatre with blues tunes by Chic Street Man. According to the SF Bay View, the West Coast premiere of Polk County is “a holiday show, one which makes you proud to be African.”
- Berkeley Rep receives a generous grant of $405,000 from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and sets a record when it receives the AT&T Onstage Award for the fifth time.
- The School of Theatre starts Performance Lab, a program that encourages high-school students to create their own plays after seeing a matinee, and Berkeley Rep initiates a series of Ghostlight Luncheons so donors can learn more about the creative process from artists and staff.

2005

- In February, Tony Taccone workshops Sarah Jones’ Bridge & Tunnel in Berkeley before taking it to Broadway, where it earns universal praise from the press, extends for five months, and wins a Tony Award for its star. “The world could use more of the wit, warmth and profound empathy that Jones’ Bridge is built on,” insists USA Today.
- In April, the Theatre attracts worldwide attention when it presents the world premiere of The People’s Temple, a docudrama about the tragedy at Jonestown. “It is a powerful work that deserves to be seen,” declares the London Guardian, “a heartbreaking story of conviction, delusion, betrayal and death.”
- Les Waters directs two world premieres as well: Charles Mee’s Fêtes de la Nuit, which the Mercury News describes as a “decadent little valentine,” and Finn in the Underworld by Jordan Harrison, “a hip little ghost story by a hot young playwright.”
- In June, a fire destroys the building that housed Berkeley Rep’s scene shop for 19 years. After the blaze, a surge of community support includes a barbecue benefit by local firefighters—and even a bake sale by two enterprising eight-year-olds that raises $132.25.
- “Brundibar is wunderbar!” exclaims KGO radio in December. Two legendary artists—Tony Kushner and Maurice Sendak—bring their storybook to life in a gorgeous production that features a ten-person cast, a 13-person orchestra, and a 29-voice children’s choir.
- The School of Theatre begins Story Builders, a workshop that lets elementary-school students transform their lessons into theatre. Kids think they’re just having fun, but the program increases literacy and reinforces state education standards.
- Berkeley Rep also introduces pre-show docent presentations tailored to each production to deepen the audience’s appreciation of the artists, the script, and its cultural context.

(MORE)
2006

- Berkeley Rep presents the world premiere of a provocative rock musical called *Passing Strange*. “If you know what’s good for you, you'll get your butt to Berkeley, plant it in a seat, and be wowed by one of this generation's greatest talents,” gushes the *SF Bay Guardian*.
- *Brundibar* enjoys a sold-out run in Manhattan, netting two nominations for the prestigious Drama Desk Award – and *Eurydice* comes back to life in New Haven, where the *New York Times* names it one of the year's ten best plays alongside *Bridge & Tunnel*.
- At home, the *Oakland Tribune* praises Rita Moreno's “powerhouse portrayal of a woman desperate to see her children succeed.” *The Glass Menagerie* extends for five weeks and becomes the longest-running show in Berkeley Rep's history. “Les Waters gave such a fresh approach to the play that it almost seemed newly minted.”
- Then Jeune Lune hits the jackpot with *The Misei*. The *San Francisco Chronicle* calls it “a glorious show, a wonder, the kind of theater that makes you keep going to theater on the off chance that you might see something this good.”
- Meanwhile, the folks at Zorro Productions, Inc are loco-enough to let Tony Taccone loose with that mythic mask – and he opens the world premiere of *Culture Clash's Zorro in Hell* in the Roda Theatre before riding south to leave audiences laughing in La Jolla and Los Angeles.
- On a more serious note, as the battle for Iraq continues, Berkeley Rep examines the toll of war with a revival of *Mother Courage* and Heather Raffo’s *9 Parts of Desire*.
- After Hurricane Katrina, members of the Teen Council know they have to act. Literally. They perform scenes from Southern plays for six straight hours, raising more than $1,500 to buy school supplies for displaced students in New Orleans.
- Berkeley Rep's Free Speech programs expand to include “liner notes,” which – like liner notes on a CD – offer extra insight into each show. Written by the literary manager, they're e-mailed to the audience before the play and enjoy an unheard of open-rate for online outreach: 55%.

2007

- The Theatre celebrates its 40th birthday, and what a year it is...
- Berkeley Rep double parks in Manhattan with two simultaneous off-Broadway shows. *Eurydice* makes the Top 10 in *Time* magazine this year, while *Passing Strange* makes the cut in the *New York Times*.
- On the left coast, the company's co-production of *after the quake* – directed by Frank Galati and based on a book by Haruki Murakami – tops the annual list in the *Los Angeles Times*. The *San Francisco Chronicle's* favorite play in 2007 is another bloody comedy from Martin McDonagh, *The Pillowman*, “brilliantly staged by Les Waters in January, and performed to perfection.”
- The Theatre helps produce the American tour of *Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist* in Berkeley, Boston, and New York. The *SF Weekly* suggests, “Like a trip to San Francisco’s Musée Mécanique, the play transports us to another time and place of magical contraptions and sideshow freaks.”
- Mary Zimmerman delivers another sold-out, seven-week sensation. “In its sublime West Coast premiere,” the *Mercury News* marvels, "*Argonautika* fuses the elegance of a ritual with the full-throttle thrill of adventure.”
- The Theatre receives a prestigious $750,000 grant from the James Irvine Foundation to pursue innovative ideas. As a result, it unveils attractive new prices that make Berkeley Rep more affordable for people in the community who are just starting school, starting careers, and starting families. In fact, some seats sell for less than they did in 1998!

(MORE)
• Then, in true Berkeley fashion, the Theatre reinvents its menu of delicious intermission treats to focus on local, sustainable, and organic foods. It also tempts theatregoers to arrive early for weekend shows by introducing a free series of tastings with samples from local culinary artisans.
• With the introduction of 30 Below, the coolest theatre party for the under-30 crowd, attendance by those in their twenties continues to climb.

2008
• In February, Berkeley Rep bursts onto Broadway when Passing Strange opens at the Belasco Theatre with its original cast intact. The show wins the Tony Award for Best Book, as well as three Drama Desk Awards, two Obie Awards, four Audelco Awards, and many other honors.
• Back in Berkeley, three solo shows extend their runs and set new sales records: Danny Hoch’s Taking Over, Nilaja Sun’s No Chickens, and Carrie Fisher’s Wishful Drinking, which becomes the top-grossing show in the Theatre’s history.
• Then Wishful Drinking and Taking Over take off for simultaneous tours that bring these shows to cities across the continent.
• In September, Tony Taccone goes back to school with the world premiere of Yellowjackets. A graduate of Berkeley High, playwright Itamar Moses sets his script in the halls of his alma mater. That local relevance, alongside electrifying performances by 11 young actors, makes this a hot ticket.
• The student newspaper at BHS – like many media outlets at the time – is in danger of folding, so Berkeley Rep’s audiences step up with more than $6,600 in donations to “Save the Jacket.” Meanwhile, the Osher Foundation expresses its generosity by making a million-dollar gift to support Berkeley Rep’s new play development program.
• Then Mary Zimmerman does it again: an alluring adaptation of The Arabian Nights extends for two weeks and plays to 99% of capacity. “This rare and breathtaking piece of theater made it into my all-time Top 10 list maybe 15 minutes after it started,” Pat Craig crows in the Contra Costa Times.
• Berkeley Rep also presents the West Coast premiere of Figaro – a dubious honor to be sure, as this lavish show turns out to be the last production by the beloved Theatre de la Jeune Lune.

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2009

- Berkeley Rep commissions In the Next Room (or the vibrator play) by playwright Sarah Ruhl. Associate Artistic Director Les Waters staged its world premiere. It went on to Broadway where it received three Tony nominations. The New York Times declared it “one of the four new best plays to be produced in New York this year.”
- In September, the world premiere of Green Day’s American Idiot, directed by Tony Award-winner Michael Mayer opened. The record-breaking run brought in the biggest advance sale in the Theatre’s history, the biggest day at the box office, and 18 of the top 20 days ever. Due to ticket demand it was extended before it even played its first performance—and eventually ran for five extra weeks. It transferred to Broadway less than two months later where it earned two Tony Awards. The show initiates a warm partnership with producers Tom Hulce and Ira Pittelman, who would later return with Ain’t Too Proud—The Life and Times of The Temptations.
- The legendary playwright, Tony Kushner, returns to Berkeley Rep with the West Coast premiere of Tiny Kushner directed by Tony Taccone. The string of one act plays took audiences from the moon to Albania to the afterlife. The San Francisco Chronicle called it “Exhilarating...penetrating...buoyant... blistering...wicked!”

2010

- The West Coast premiere of The Great Game: Afghanistan, a sweeping cycle of short scripts by 12 playwrights takes patrons through the history of Afghanistan. After the run, The Great Game ventures on a four city American tour including a stop in Washington, D.C. to educate personnel at the Pentagon.
- Berkeley Rep and The Public Theatre commissions Compulsion by playwright Rinnie Groff and produces the world premiere production with Yale Repertory Theatre. After an initial run in New Haven, Oskar Eustis refines the show at Berkeley Rep. It stars Tony Award-winning actor Mandy Patinkin and goes on to a successful off-Broadway run.
- Emmy and Obie Award-winning performer John Leguizamo begins his relationship with Berkeley Rep when he workshops his new solo show as part of the Fireworks Festival. After much success in Berkeley, Klass Klown goes on to an extended run on Broadway under the new name, Ghetto Klown.
- The two-character production of Girlfriend becomes the second world premiere musical in the 2009-10 season after American Idiot. It’s an eternal love story turned upside down, a dual-Romeo duet based on Matthew Sweet’s landmark album Girlfriend and directed by Associate Director Les Waters.

2011

- Berkeley Rep acquires the former North Face headquarters in West Berkeley, dubbing it the “Harrison Street campus.” For the first time, all of Berkeley Rep’s shops are united under one roof, along with the administration staff. The vibrant new campus becomes a center for innovation and an R&D facility for artists.
- Anna Deavere Smith once again shows she has her finger on the pulse of the American conscience with Let Me Down Easy — a show about the vulnerability of the human body, the resilience of the spirit and the price of health care — as the nation debates Obamacare/The Affordable Care Act.

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• The legendary Rita Moreno takes audiences behind the glitz and glamour of show biz with the world premiere of her autobiographical show *Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup*, developed with Tony Taccone and directed by David Galligan. The 79-year-old actress even kept her backup dancers on their toes. “Raw, honest, fun, inspiring. What a life in show biz is all about. Hats off to Rita. Do not miss this show!”— KCBS-AM & KRON-TV

2012
• Cultures collide and hilarity ensues when an American businessman goes to China in the West Coast premiere of David Henry Hwang's Broadway hit *Chinglish*, directed by Leigh Silverman. Life imitates art when Berkeley Rep’s production travels to the Hong Kong Arts Festival, becoming the first Berkeley Rep show to go to Asia.
• Michael Leibert Artistic Director Tony Taccone and Jonathan Moscone join forces for the world premiere *Ghost Light*, which conjures an imaginary world based on the historic assassination of San Francisco Mayor George Moscone. The play received standing ovations at Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2011 before opening at Berkeley Rep in 2012.

2013
• The British Invasion, part two: Bay Area audiences are gobsmacked when legendary actors Sir Ian McKellen and Sir Patrick Stewart take the Roda Stage in the pre-Broadway engagement of Harold Pinter’s masterwork, *No Man’s Land*, directed by Sean Mathias.
• Thanks to a $1 million innovation grant from the Irvine Foundation, the Theatre launches The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep’s Center for the Creation and Development of New Work. The subsequent launch of the Create Campaign helps develop the Harrison Street campus, fund The Ground Floor, and renovate the Thrust Stage.
• Berkeley Rep hooks up with British company Knee High Theatre for the American premiere of *The Wild Bride*. The show married terrific reviews with audience ovations — and extended for three weeks. That reception led to an off Broadway run at St. Ann’s Warehouse.
• The School of Theatre celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Teen One-Acts Festival. Over the years, approximately 350 young artists have participated in the festival, whose notable alumni include Katie Henry (winner of Young Playwrights Inc.’s National Playwriting Contest), Roxie Perkins (recipient of Dr. Floyd Gaffney National Playwriting Award), and Lauren Yee (*Ching Chong Chinaman*), who has gone on to become one of the most sought after playwrights in the country.

2014
• Berkeley Rep commissions a new play from Oakland native Marcus Gardley. *The House that will not Stanc*, a play that unearths a story about free women of color in 1836 New Orleans, was nurtured in The Ground Floor, and receives its world premiere on the Thrust Stage. *Time* magazine deems it “One of ten reasons for theatre lovers to leave New York.”

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2015

- On the night of the terrorist attacks in Paris (November 13), *Disgraced* by Ayad Akhtar has its West Coast premiere in the Roda Theatre. As the applause died down, the actors stared straight ahead, held hands, and bowed their heads for a moment of silence. Says Robert Hurwitt in the *Chronicle*, “The packed, still house joined in unstated but explicit shared humanity and solidarity with the people of Paris. And, I believe, with freedom for art, thought and life itself. Yes, I wept.”
- *Amelie, A New Musical* has its world premiere on the Roda Stage. Directed by Tony Award winner Pam MacKinnon, the musical based on the hit French film would eventually land on Broadway. “Bursts with joy, delight, imagination, talent, and tenderness.”—*SF Weekly*

2016

- *Aubergine*, by Julia Cho and directed by Tony Taccone, becomes the first play to be staged in the newly minted Peet’s Theatre. Audiences have an insatiable appetite for this world premiere developed in The Ground Floor; *Aubergine* becomes the sleeper hit of the 2015–16 season.
- John Leguizamo schools Berkeley Rep audiences in the world premiere of *Latin History for Morons*, directed by Tony Taccone and developed in The Ground Floor. *Latin History* earns an “A.” After sold-out performances in Berkeley, it goes on to New York and Broadway and earns a 2018 Tony Award nomination for Best Play and Leguizamo also scores a Special Tony Award.
- As the 2016 presidential race heats up, Berkeley Rep stages a world premiere adaptation of *It Can’t Happen Here*. Based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis that follows the ascent of a demagogue who becomes president of the United States, *It Can’t Happen Here* is adapted by Bennett S. Cohen and Tony Taccone, and directed by Berkeley Rep’s new Associate Director Lisa Peterson. Two days after the show closes, we find out that indeed it can happen here.

2017

- The forecast calls for love, laughs, and a whole lot of rain when Berkeley Rep presents the world premiere of *Monsoon Wedding*. Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Mira Nair based on her hit film and featuring an international cast and creative team, this musical charmed audiences so much it was extended by three weeks.
- The 2017-18 season sees a phenomenal start when *Ain’t Too Proud—The Life and Times of The Temptations* dances onto the Roda Stage. Written by Dominique Morisseau and directed by Tony Award winner Des McAnuff with electrifying choreography by Sergio Trujillo, *Ain’t Too Proud* would become the highest-grossing show in Berkeley Rep’s 35-year history. After a four-week extension, Berkeley Rep became the first professional theatre in the country to offer a live simulcast when the closing performance was shown on BAMPFA’s outdoor screen. With a packed house and 1,100 in attendance at the free simulcast, the final performance of *Ain’t Too Proud* is seen by more people than any other single performance in Berkeley Rep’s history.

2018

- The great work begins again when *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* returns to the hands of director Tony Taccone who, with Oskar Eustis, first commissioned the play when they were at the Eureka Theatre in San Francisco. After a nearly 20-year absence from the Bay Area, Tony Kushner’s Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece takes flight for a three-month run in the Roda Theatre. “Tony Taccone’s revival is magnificent in its urgency, clarity and almost therapeutic power in the Trump era,” says the *San Jose Mercury News.*

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2019
• Johanna Pfaelzer joins Berkley Rep as its new artistic director.

After Five Decades...

• With more than 14,000 subscribers and a budget of $16 million, Berkeley Rep now welcomes an annual audience of 200,000, serves 21,000 students, and hosts dozens of community groups, thanks to 1,000 volunteers and more than 400 artists, artisans, and administrators.
• In fact, after five decades, nearly 5.5 million people have enjoyed 500 shows at Berkeley Rep, including 80 world premieres, 52 West Coast premieres, and six American premieres. It truly is a journey from a storefront to the forefront of American theatre.

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