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THE BERKELEY REP MAGAZINE 2008–09 · ISSUE 7

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CALENDAR
Unless otherwise noted, all pre- and post-show events are for You, Nero.
Docent presentations take place one hour before each Tuesday and Thursday 8pm performance for the run of this production.

MAY
15 Target® Teen Night, 6:30pm
15 Tasting: Bedarra Vineyards, 7pm
15 First preview, 8pm
16 Tasting: Triple Rock Brewery, 7pm
17 Tasting: Bedarra Vineyards, 6pm
20 Opening Night Dinner, 6pm
20 Opening Night, 8pm
21 Corporate Night, 6pm
22 Cal Night, 7pm
23 Cal Alumni Night, 7pm
24 YMCA Night, 6pm
24 Final performance, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, 7pm
29 Tasting: Raymond Vineyards, 7pm

JUNE
3 Teen Council, 5pm
4 Post-show discussion, 8pm
5 Tasting: Venus Restaurant, 7pm
6 Backstage Tour, 10am
6 Tasting, Teance, 7pm
7 Family Series, 11am
16 Post-show discussion, 8pm
19 Post-show discussion, 8pm
20 Ghostlight discussion, 11:30am
22 Summer Theatre Intensive (grades 6–8) begins
28 Final performance, 7pm

JULY
6 Summer session of evening classes for adults begins
17 Summer Theatre Intensive (grades 6–8) final performance
20 Summer Theatre Intensive (grades 9–12) begins

AUGUST
Subscriber tickets mailed
14 Summer Theatre Intensive (grades 9–12) final performance

We’ll see you in September for American Idiot!

Donate appreciation event
School of Theatre event
A new world is upon us. It is a world marked by fear about the economy and worry about the future, concern about resources, and the need to exercise caution. Everywhere there are people trying to make do with less, trying to adjust their personal and collective expectations as to how they will live. Cutting budgets, slashing payrolls, getting leaner and meaner, these are the standard strategies being implemented as businesses try to survive an unforgiving capitalist meltdown of global proportions. It is a cycle, to be sure, but as harsh a one as we have seen for a very long time.

In the midst of all this strife, however, there is an amazing opportunity. Intense reflection on the habits, behaviors, and patterns of experience that brought us to this juncture offer us the chance to reevaluate the good and the bad, what we like about the system and what we don’t. Moreover, we can use this time to look at ourselves: who are we and who we want to be. Like an animal shedding its outworn skin or a life form attempting to move to the next stage of evolution, we find ourselves at a crossroads in the development of our identity.

At Berkeley Rep, we are using this crisis to re-affirm and embrace what we feel is important: the production of fearless new work and the sustenance of the artists who create that work. It may seem counterintuitive, but we feel this is the best time to take intelligent risks: when the world is wide open, when our ideas about the “familiar” and the “tried and true” no longer carry their former weight. Formerly “safe” formulas used by regional theatres to program seasons (five or six familiar titles taken from the classical canon) seem somewhat tired and irrelevant. As painful as the economic situation is, we find ourselves on the brink of a different era with the chance to make a difference in the history of regional theatre.

Fortunately, we are in an excellent position to do just that. A generation of terrifically talented playwrights and directors has reached full maturity, capable of creating dynamic, enthralling, meaningful theatre. Grounded in history and comfortable with their craft, these artists are fulfilling the 50-year-old promise of regional theatre: they are producing a body of original work that has a living and lasting impact, that enhances the discourse in our communities, that entertains and sustains us.

Amy Freed is one of these artists. Amy’s work is distinguished by a salacious wit, a fervent critique of the culture, and an unbridled imagination. Her plays use every kind of comic invention to make deadly serious points. It is a great pleasure to welcome her and her subversive band of colleagues to our stage. It is a great pleasure to boldly move forward into the future.

All the best,

Tony Taccone
WANT YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER TO WIN A NOBEL PRIZE?

A recent article in *Psychology Today* hints at how to help that happen. Michele and Robert Root-Bernstein, authors of *The 13 Sparks of Genius*, have published a study in which they’ve found that Nobel laureates are 25 times as likely as average scientists to sing, dance, or act; 17 times as likely to be visual artists; 12 times more likely to write poetry and literature; four times as likely to be musicians; and twice as likely to be photographers. Creativity and imagination are essential to an individual’s success, and you can invest in this success by signing your children up for summer classes at the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre.

My father was not a Nobel laureate, but he was a research scientist. He often talked about the need for scientists to access their creative selves in order to imagine things that had not been imagined before. Einstein considered art and science to be branches on the same tree, and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Max Planck said it best: “The creative scientist needs an *artistic* imagination.”

Imagination, of course, is something that must be nurtured and developed. With current budget cuts in our schools, and the increasing demands on our daily lives, it’s easy to allow artistic pursuits to fall to one side. But at what cost?

Next door at the Nevo Education Center, the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre provides children, teens, and adults with classes like improv, hip-hop, stage combat, and — of course — acting to explore their own creative impulses. In local classrooms, the School augments under-funded arts budgets through literacy and play-creation programs, all of which provide core curricular standards alongside imaginative play. Most students touched by these classes will not pursue careers in the arts, but hopefully they will discover that innovation and imagination are intellectual tools to be treasured.

As I write this, public-school funding is at the forefront of the national agenda. We are at the low point — we hope — of an international economic crisis. This is a time of terrible hardship for many in this community. Yet it is also a monumental opportunity for us to rethink our priorities. As we consider what kind of country the United States will be in 10, 20, or 30 years, we need to ask ourselves how we plan to nurture the innovative and creative spirit that has distinguished this nation.

We can help nourish that spirit by ensuring that the arts are reinstated as an essential part of an American education. While our children may not end up winning Nobels, there is no telling what they’ll accomplish with fully educated imaginations.

And in the meantime, I invite you to explore the offerings at the School — for yourself and for your family.

Warmly,

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REPORT

Venistis, vidistis, videbitis plura
(You came, you saw, you will see more.)

BY MEGAN WYGANT AND ELISSA DUNN

YOU, NERO IS THE FINAL SHOW OF BERKELEY Rep’s 2008–09 season — and we’re sad to say vale. But we look forward to introducing you to seven more inspired shows at Berkeley Rep this fall. The new season is one of premieres — four world, two West Coast — and yet, the names are familiar: Tony Kushner. South Africa’s great playwright Athol Fugard. Naomi Iizuka. Even artists whose work arrives on our stages for the first time — like Green Day, musician Matthew Sweet, Aurelia Thierrée, Tony Award winner Michael Mayer, and Broadway’s Lisa Kron and Leigh Silverman — have stories and faces you’ll recognize. Mark your calendars — it’s going to be a great season.

Whether you’re a longtime subscriber or this is your first time in the Theatre, we’re glad you’re here for this performance of You, Nero. Thank you for your support...and we hope to see you in September!
ANNOUNCING THE FULL 2009–10 SEASON

WORLD PREMIERE

American Idiot
Book by Michael Mayer and Billie Joe Armstrong • Lyrics by Billie Joe Armstrong • Music by Green Day
Choreographed by Steven Hoggett
Directed by Michael Mayer
Roda Theatre • Limited Season
September 4–October 11, 2009
Green Day won two Grammys for its multi-platinum American Idiot, which sold more than 12 million copies worldwide. Now the band brings that explosive album to the stage with Michael Mayer, Tony Award–winning director of Spring Awakening. American Idiot follows working-class characters from the suburbs to the city to the Middle East, as they seek redemption in a world filled with frustration—an exhilarating journey borne along by Green Day’s electrifying songs.

WEST COAST PREMIERE

Tiny Kushner
Written by Tony Kushner • Directed by Tony Taccone • Thrust Stage • Main Season
October 16–November 29, 2009
Tony Kushner and Artistic Director Tony Taccone are together again, this time for a series of short scripts. Travel to the moon—and to the afterlife—with Laura Bush, Nixon’s analyst, the queen of Albania, and a host of real-life tax evaders, all treading water in an increasingly fragile world. The legendary Kushner brings his brilliance and humor to bear in a sparkling string of one-act plays—guided, as always, by an unwavering moral compass. Don’t miss these gems from a theatrical giant. Don’t miss Tiny Kushner.

WORLD PREMIERE

Coming Home
Written by Athol Fugard • Directed by Gordon Edelstein • Thrust Stage • Main Season
January 15–February 28, 2010
Ten years after running off to the city to pursue her dreams, Veronica returns in rags. Among her meager belongings, she carries a desperate secret—and determination to plant the seeds of a new life for her son. It’s a “sad, sweet, and gently moving” show, says the New York Times, “a beautifully acted production directed by Gordon Edelstein.” Time magazine calls Athol Fugard “the greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world.” In Coming Home, he once again confronts the hard truths of his homeland while celebrating the unquenchable power of hope.

WORLD PREMIERE

Concerning Strange Devices from the Distant West
Written by Naomi Iizuka • Directed by Les Waters • Roda Theatre • Main Season
February 26–April 11, 2010
Naomi Iizuka explores the intersection of art and authenticity in a haunting new play commissioned by Berkeley Rep. In this world premiere directed by Les Waters, wealthy Americans invade Yokohama in the 1880s with a weird new technology. Their cameras capture images of geishas, monks, and shrines and send them to the future in a flash—where we continue to seek meaning through lenses of exoticism and xenophobia.

WORLD PREMIERE

Girlfriend
Book by Todd Almond • Music and lyrics by Matthew Sweet • Directed by Les Waters
Thrust Stage • Limited Season
April 9–May 9, 2010
Romance unfolds in a new musical wound around the tender love songs of Matthew Sweet’s landmark album, Girlfriend. Meeting in homeroom, Cruising through town. Holding hands. Cheering from the stands. That awkward first kiss. Boy meets boy. It’s an eternal story turned upside down, a dual-Romeo duet directed by Les Waters that’s innocent… and Sweet. “Girlfriend is the breathless testimony of a fool for love,” raves Rolling Stone, “a rock ‘n’ roll valentine that delivers subtle wisdom with an exhilarating kick.” Fall in love with the boy next door at Girlfriend.

WORLD PREMIERE

A New Play
Written by Lisa Kron • Directed by Leigh Silverman • Roda Theatre • Main Season • In association with Center Theatre Group
May 14–June 27, 2010
After an idyllic Thanksgiving filled with food, football, family, and friends, a woman discovers how one passionate act can affect everything... her faith in love, in her country, in herself. Obie Award—winners Lisa Kron and Leigh Silverman reunite for a powerful world premiere that questions whether we, as Americans, appreciate our freedom.

Aurélia’s Oratorio
Written and directed by Victoria Thierrée
Chaplin • Roda Theatre • Main Season
December 4, 2009–January 24, 2010
Aurélia Thierrée literally grew up in the circus. This holiday season, peek behind her velvet curtain to discover a surreal world of surprises, a topsy-turvy time of tricks and transformations. With dancing, puppetry, acrobatics, and more, it’s a 90-minute concoction of mystery and fantasy for the whole family. Welcome to Aurélia’s Oratorio, where the impossible happens before your eyes.
Subscribe and save

As a theatre-lover, your best value comes with a multi-play package of three or more shows. And, the more productions you see, the further your dollars stretch. If you’re not already a subscriber, there’s still plenty of time for you to join us. You can read about our flexible ticket packages at berkeleyrep.org, but here are some things you might want to consider when you plan your schedule:

**Attend on a night with free pre-show tastings:** Most Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evening performances include pre-show events sampling wine, hand-crafted chocolate, and artisanal treats from local vendors. What a great way to whet your palate for an evening of theatre.

**Add a pre-show talk to your schedule:** Before any Tuesday and Thursday evening performance, arrive at 7pm to gain information and insight from Berkeley Rep’s knowledgeable docents.

**Choose a series that includes post-show discussions:** On select evenings, audience members can stay behind after the show for a conversation with the cast or other members of the artistic team.

**Join the club:** Did you know that ticket sales cover only half of the cost of producing each show? To really engage with the work, make a donation to the Annual Fund. Donors enjoy special access to the Theatre, including backstage tours and meetings with the staff. It’s a great chance to achieve a deeper connection to the work you enjoy at Berkeley Rep.

---

**Subscribe and save...more!**

If you’re in one of these groups, you enjoy extra savings.

**Teachers and administrators in K-12 education:** Save 40% on seats in sections A and B on Tue 8pm, Fri 8pm, and Sat 2pm.

**Full-time students / under 30:** Save 50% for a package of five or more plays. Not available for previews.

**Over 65?** Save $5 per play on your subscription for Thu 2pm, Sat 2pm, and Sun 2pm performances.

**Come as a group:** Now is the perfect time to introduce your friends, a class, or business colleagues to the Berkeley Rep experience. If you bring a group of 10 or more to the Theatre, you can save up to 20%! And it’s convenient: you can reserve seats in a block, or set your friends up to buy their own tickets online at a discount. Bringing more than 15 people? You enjoy a free ticket for arranging the group.

Extend group discounts to your business associates and colleagues. Mix it up by bringing a college class to 30 Below, where under-30 tickets start at just $13.50 and include a free post-show party. Plan a night on the town with friends and arrive early to enjoy free wine-tastings, samples of handcrafted chocolates, or other artisanal goods. Or, you can arrange for a docent to speak to your group—or it’s offsite or in a private room here at the Theatre.

Group tickets go fast, so it’s best to plan ahead. Call Elissa Dunn at 510 647-2918, or email edunn@berkeleyrep.org.

**Go 30 Below:** 30 Below is a party night for audience members in their 20s that includes discounted tickets the play and a post-show gathering with free food, drinks, and dancing. If you’re part of the under-30 crowd, it’s a great chance to mingle with the actors and other local theatre-lovers.

Here at Berkeley Rep, we believe it’s important to encourage young audiences to attend the theatre and become invested in the local arts scene. These young audiences represent the future health of this organization and other arts groups in the Bay Area. And, since launching the 30 Below program two years ago, our audience has, overall, grown younger. Nearly 20% of our patrons are under 30. By continuing to invest in our young audiences, we’re ensuring the future of Berkeley Rep and other arts organizations. If you’re under 30 and haven’t caught one of these parties yet, you’re missing out: We hope to see you next year!
As the stage begins to shift, the actor disappears backstage — and reappears 15 seconds later, in a whole new costume. Suddenly it’s a new time and a new place. You, the audience, aren’t supposed to think too hard about this, but you’ve just witnessed a quick-change. Backstage, a transformation has just taken place that required precise planning, rigorous rehearsal, tons of teamwork, and to-the-second timing.

While their work is ever-present when actors are on stage, the wardrobe crew moves in a realm literally invisible to the audience. They arrive at the theatre about three hours before the show starts to pre-set costumes for the actors and begin checking to make sure that everything is ready to go. Pre-show, they help the actors get outfitted — some costumes require two people — and might even apply special makeup, such as the scars on King Shahryar for The Arabian Nights. Throughout the show, the wardrobe crew will be behind the scenes, adding blood to costumes as in The Lieutenant of Inishmore, providing robes for the undressed, like in the final scene of In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)...and of course, being on hand for those quick changes.

After the show, as the actors change into their street clothes, the wardrobe crew goes through every article of clothing to prepare it for the next performance. Actors sweat under hot stage lights, so costumes must be washed or freshened (a wardrobe trick to cleanse a very sweaty costume is to spritz it with vodka). For very messy shows — where costumes are covered with blood, water, mud, or other substances — duplicate sets of costumes make it possible to perform the show twice in the same day. After washing, pressing, and stitching, the wardrobe crew often finishes work shortly before midnight.

The quick-change — that 15-second jump a character must make from one day to the next — is the hardest and most nerve-wracking test of the wardrobe crew’s speed and ability. It can literally make or break a show. Precious seconds tick away as one person pulls off shoes, another pulls off a coat, and yet another adjusts a microphone hidden in the actor’s wig — or switches the wig entirely. Plus, there are often pants, shirts, and dresses to remove and replace, and of course, by the time the actor re-enters the stage, they must look as if they’ve been dressed this way for hours. According to Barbara Blair, Berkeley Rep’s wardrobe supervisor, this magical transformation is all about teamwork. “For quick changes, you can break down time and accomplish a lot in 15 seconds,” says Blair. “With five people, we’re faster than a NASCAR pit-crew.”

And just like a NASCAR pit-crew, perfecting this timing requires practice. During the rehearsal period, the wardrobe crew spends the weeks leading up to the show committing their assigned tasks to muscle memory, literally down to the second. The backstage show is choreographed as fully as what you see in front of the curtain — because once the show starts, the crew members must hit their marks with equal accuracy and precision. And, while the crew
sometimes wear headlamps, their side of the dance is often conducted in near-complete darkness, as their eyes race to adjust to the harsh change between bright stage lights and between-the-scenes darkness.

Whether it’s a single seam that just won’t stick, or 14 cast members changing costumes in the same 15-second timespan, the wardrobe department receives a truly unique perspective on the production. It requires a solid team to get a job like this done — especially when they’re dancing in the dark.

Click blog.berkeleyrep.org to read tales from the wardrobe department—and outtakes from this article!

Have a hankering to see the invisible? Invitations to backstage tours are a benefit of donating at the Friend Level or higher. Visit berkeleyrep.org/give or email info@berkeleyrep.org for more information
A toast to Narsai

BY LAURA FICTENBERG

THOUGH HE HAS NEVER PERFORMED ON A BERKELEY REP STAGE, NARSAI DAVID received a standing ovation and a toast from hundreds of theatre-lovers last month at the gourmet fundraising gala that bears his name—the 17th annual and final installment of the Narsai Toast, titled “Bon Voyage.”

Behind the scenes, the Bay Area gourmand and culinary personality has been a tireless advocate of Berkeley Rep since its early days. He was a founding Board member and as the host of the Narsai Toast, the Theatre’s wildly successful gastronomic gala.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14
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“This is a bittersweet moment,” said Susie Medak, managing director of Berkeley Rep, as Narsai stepped off the podium for the last time. “Narsai has been a valued supporter of Berkeley Rep since the days when this theatre was just an upstart organization on College Avenue. We’re not the same theatre we were 40 years ago, but our growth has come from strict adherence to the highest artistic standards and a belief in providing an environment in which talented artists can do their best work. Narsai and his wife Venus have been champions of these values and of Berkeley Rep throughout the Bay Area, and their efforts have had a huge impact on advancing our growth. We are deeply grateful to Narsai for his years of service.”

In 1993, Narsai assembled a star-studded cast of celebrity chefs for a Berkeley Rep fundraising event, the Narsai Roast, during which guests enjoyed some good-natured fun at his expense and an unforgettable meal. The event was a hit and the Narsai Toast was born! No one could have imagined that this event would turn into one of the most celebrated culinary events in the Bay Area, raising more than $4.7 million for Berkeley Rep over the years.

Since then, members of the local arts, business, and philanthropic communities have gathered to support Berkeley Rep and to partake in a spectacular meal prepared by some of the country’s finest chefs—including Wolfgang Puck, Paul Prudhomme, Nancy Oakes, and Michael Mina to name a few. Adding their names to this illustrious list are the hundreds of Berkeley Rep trustees, staff, and volunteers whose passion and commitment have made the Narsai Toast a resounding success time and again.

As he steps off the stage for the last time and reclaims his seat in the audience, all of us at the Theatre raise a glass to Narsai for his extraordinary work over the years on behalf of Berkeley Rep. Salut! And bon voyage!
“A LOT OF LIFE IS IMPROV,” SAYS DEAN HANLEY, attorney at law. Dean and his wife, Helene, took two improvisation classes together last year at the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre. After having a great time in the improv classes, Dean noticed a description for another class—Acting Techniques for Confidence in Corporate and Courtroom Worlds—and invited colleagues from his firm, Paul and Hanley, LLP, to take the class with him. The firm paid for 11 of its employees to attend, including Dean himself.

In light of the current economic downturn, one might wonder how a law firm can afford for its employees to take acting classes. But Dean sees the training as vocational enrichment, giving them a competitive edge. “The classes at Berkeley Rep are

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
effective on two levels,” he explains. “First, in the courtroom, we perform to an audience of 12 — we have to learn to communicate our thoughts and feelings persuasively. Second, it’s helpful in our day-to-day life, in a subtle way which is more difficult to specify. I’ve seen a difference for everyone who took the class. To be honest, I hope that our opposition doesn’t take these classes!”

Many professionals like Dean are finding that the skills they learn in classes at the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre can give them a competitive edge, or make them more marketable in an unstable job market. Other students are finding that the floundering economy has given them a chance to reevaluate their priorities, and maybe even more free time to fill with creative activities that make them feel good about themselves. Take Elizabeth Banks, a playwriting student: Elizabeth works for the state of California as a consultant for the Department of Health. This winter, she found herself with extra time on her hands following work furloughs and a car accident which required her to rest. That’s when her husband gave her a playwriting class at the School as a Christmas gift. “I had never done any kind of creative writing before,” she says. “But I thought this could be a great way to fill my time, and an opportunity to find out more about myself. Now I’m hooked.”

While many people would feel discouraged by being furloughed from work, Elizabeth took it as an opportunity to try something she had never done before, and discovered a new side of herself. She explains, “The structure of the class made it work for me. Gary Graves, the instructor, was amazing, the tuition was cheap, it was an adult learning environment, and it was once a week, so it was manageable for someone with a full-time job.” Once she returned to work, being able to fit the class into her schedule was the best part. “When I write for my job,” she says, “I have to follow the principles of documentation laid out by the state, and usually the only feedback I get is ‘Workload met,’ or ‘workload not met.’ It’s nothing like writing a play. Even though it was a collaborative process with the other students, I had ownership of it. And I loved getting a real critique from Gary at the end.”

Trying something new—or finding something new within yourself—is part of what the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre is all about. In ten weeks, Elizabeth went from having never considered writing a play to finishing a first draft of a full-length, 80-page comedy, which she plans to workshop this summer in the playwriting workshop at the School of Theatre. Dean Hanley plans to take more improv classes. “Life is improv,” he reminds us, “Plus, the classes are a lot of fun!”
Supporters in the spotlight: Bonnie Killip

BY MEGAN WYGANT

WE PLANNED A FIVE-MINUTE CHAT with Bonnie Killip about her relationship with Berkeley Rep; we ended up talking for 20. That’s because she’s a docent for Dunsmuir House, the Oakland Zoo, and the Oakland Museum; she’s recently backed off the world traveling, skiing, and biking. As the photo in the ad at right shows, she’s also a model for St. Paul’s Towers. Bonnie’s been an usher at Berkeley Rep since before the Theatre moved to its current location in 1980 — and a long-time donor, as well.

What made you start ushering?
My husband and I loved going to the theatre, but cost was always an issue. Our neighbor ushered all over the place, and saw everything, so we started going together. We volunteered at A.C.T. and the Orpheum, the Curran, the Symphony, the Opera...we did it all. These days, I buy tickets to most productions; I only usher for the Paramount and Berkeley Rep. But I like ushering because I enjoy meeting the people. I’ve lived in this area since I was four years old, and taught in the Bay Area for 30 years, so I see a lot of people that I used to know.

What has been your most interesting experience as an usher?
I always enjoy listening to what the audience members say about the show during intermission or as they’re leaving. But one of the most interesting things that happened to me was that some years ago, when Bonnie Raitt was a subscriber, she arrived at the Theatre early. She was looking for the donor lounge, and couldn’t remember how to get in. Since I’m a donor too, I let her in — and she asked, “if you’re a donor, then why are you an usher?” And I said, “Well, "I think it’s important to support organizations that grow out of my community...”

I have the opportunity as an usher to meet interesting people like you!” And she laughed. She always made a point of saying hello after that.

What has been your favorite show at Berkeley Rep?
I really liked Honour. I’ve always been a feminist and a big believer in equality, and I thought it was just great the way the main character really let her husband have it when she realized he had been deceptive with her. I loved the way she came into her own, then. I didn’t think I’d like In the Next Room (or the vibrator play), but I did—probably for many of the same reasons. And The Arabian Nights was just terrific. I like plays that have good messages. They’re the shows that linger with you.

You choose to support the Theatre both as a donor and a volunteer—why?
With this economy, my living situation, and the fact that there are so many different groups that I like to support, I don’t give very much, but I give what I can. I think it’s important to support organizations that grow out of my community. I think Tony Taccone recognizes that there are lots of different groups of people who enjoy theatre, and does a good job of reaching out to all different audiences with the directors and actors he brings to Berkeley Rep.

My life here

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Lifestyles of
THE RICH AND ROMAN
BY ALEX ROSENTHAL
Conditions at the beginning of the first millennium AD were ripe for the accumulation of wealth. An era of peace following several hundred years of Roman territorial expansion provided the perfect environment for the Empire’s economy to grow. A workforce consisting of millions of farmers, skilled laborers, and merchants greased the wheels of the civilization’s various enterprises. During previous centuries, private fortunes had been owned and controlled solely by aristocratic families. By the time Nero became emperor in 54 AD, however, a commercial boom made it possible for a new class of professionals — traders, bankers, creditors, investors, lawyers, and others — to build up their coffers. The low cost of living combined with easy access to money to create the economic phenomenon we now refer to as “disposable income.” Members of the middle and upper classes found themselves with a surfeit of time and money. The notion of buying things for pure enjoyment became a source of personal pride and political power, and led to a glut of excessive and extravagant expenditures. The following represent some of the specific examples of Roman decadence that resulted.

PARTIES
Rich Romans were master party-planners. Their dinner parties, which doubled as social functions and entertainment venues, provided opportunities to indulge in every variety of bizarre and exotic experience.

Menus at feasts varied greatly, but some of the more colorful dishes included sheep-brain pâté, stuffed sow womb, sow udders, camel’s feet, ostrich ragout, flamingo brains, boiled parrot, fried electric eel, stuffed sea urchin, jellyfish salad, and dolphin meatballs. One man dissolved a pearl worth about $900,000 in vinegar and drank it. Nero himself found a way to make the simplest drink an object of excess — his *decocta Neronis* consisted of water boiled and then cooled in snow (the term translates to “the distilled water of Nero”). And the spending did not end when hosts had bought the most expensive foods possible; there were still gifts to be given.
The emperor Lucius Verus spent $5.5 million on a feast wherein he sent his guests home with gifts of slaves and ornate carriages complete with mules and drivers.

The meal was not always over when guests had sated their appetites. Some dedicated connoisseurs made use of emetics to induce vomiting so that they could keep the culinary experiences rolling. This may have been the exception to the rule, but it was sufficiently commonplace that doctors penned guides for the proper practice of regurgitation.

Roman epicures displayed such a penchant for lavish dinners and expensive ingredients that the government felt a need to curtail their spending. During the Republic (509–27 BC), the government passed a series of (mostly ineffectual) laws limiting the amount a host could spend, the number of guests at a dinner, and the foods that could be served. Even Nero passed a law effectively limiting the size of public picnics. That a government as extravagant as Nero’s saw need to rein in the lavish gourmandizing of the rich is indicative of the extent of the excess.

Dinners were accompanied by all manners of entertainment, ranging from drinking games, music, and poetry reading, to performances by jugglers, acrobats, and dwarves. The term “Roman orgy” is a bit misleading in a modern context; very little record exists of these parties devolving into sexualizing, to performances by jugglers, acrobats, and dwarves. The term “Roman orgy” is a bit misleading in a modern context; very little record exists of these parties devolving into sexual. “Orgy” referred to a ritual in which dancers worked themselves into a trance and gave control of their bodies over to Bacchus, the god of wine. Events such as these, however, did not occur on a regular basis during parties thrown by the rich.

As if to make up for this lack of prurience, some of the Roman emperors immersed themselves in perversions beyond belief. As recorded by Roman historians, Caligula allegedly not only committed incest with his sisters, but also prostituted them to his friends. The boy emperor Elagabalus dressed in drag and prostituted himself in Rome’s brothels.

**GAMES**

Politically inspired entertainment had a long history in Rome. During the Republic, senators up for election sponsored gladiatorial games in the hopes of winning the votes of their impressed constituents. The situation changed when Augustus, the first Roman emperor, limited the size of games held by anyone other than the emperor himself. For most emperors, the games served as a celebration of their divine cults of personality. At the same time, the games provided an opportunity for the people of the empire to see their ruler on a very human and personal level, enjoying the gory spectacles alongside them (similar to when a president throws the first pitch of a baseball game, the difference being the substitution of a deadly weapon for the ball).

Under the emperors, gladiatorial games reached an acme of excess never dreamed of during the Republic. The opening of the Colosseum, with a seating capacity estimated between 50,000 and 80,000, was celebrated with 100 consecutive days of games. Aside from the innumerable gladiators who battled and killed each other, around 10,000 animals—including foreign creatures such as elephants and rhinoceroses—fought against each other. Entire battles were staged, both on sandy terrain and as naval encounters in water-filled arenas.

While 100 days was a particularly long celebration, this degree of spectacle was not uncommon, and emperors seemed to be in a constant struggle to outdo themselves. Free food was not only handed out to spectators, but one account describes sweetmeats, dates, cakes, and other goodies being showered upon the heads of the audience. And these were not the only blessings from above: sweaty patrons were sprayed down with water, and tried to catch little wooden balls tossed into the crowd which were redeemable for everything from clothing to slaves to the deed for an apartment.

A typical day at the games began with a parade of various political figures, followed by musicians and the gladiators themselves. The morning events consisted of animal acts which involved exhibiting dangerous creatures and placing them in mortal combat with warriors. This was followed by midday executions, wherein criminals were put to death in a variety of creative and gruesome ways. For example, “Mt. Aetna,” a bandit nicknamed after a local volcano, was placed on a scaffold which “erupted” and sent him hurtling downward into the cages of ravenous animals. In another case, criminals’ clothing burst into flames in the middle of a ritualized dance.

The main event, gladiator fights, followed the executions. The usual form of combat consisted of gladiators, paired by skill level, dueling until one combatant found himself incapacitated or deprived of his weapon. While gladiators might be killed or mortally injured over the course of combat, the preferable outcome was for one to disarm the other. At this point all eyes turned to an official called the editor. He issued an order to either kill or spare the loser as influenced by the chanting of the masses, many of whom had placed bets on the outcome.

More than simply providing an entertainment and a gambling opportunity, the games served as a major social attraction and, for some audiences, a singles mixer. Some men went to the arena with the express purpose of picking up women. The poet Ovid even published a manual with tips as to how to seduce a love interest at the games.

The emperor Commodus (fictionalized in the movie *Gladiator*) saw himself as a gladiator, and subjected the populace to displays of him winning rigged matches and slaughtering hapless creatures such as giraffes and ostriches. In one case, which he advertised as a battle against giants, he collected those in the city who had lost their feet, dressed them in serpent costumes, gave them sponges to throw at him as simulacra of rocks, and proceeded to club them to death. Firsthand accounts portray Commodus’s displays as distasteful and embarrassing; such extremes of excess apparently alienated and frightened the populace, but it must be remembered that this was in a context in which the large-scale slaughter of animals, criminals, and warriors was met with thunderous applause.

**REAL ESTATE**

Another fashionable showcase for wealthy Romans was the display of one’s home. Millionaires competed to own the most lavish and enormous estates. Nero had a palace built for himself which was dubbed the *Domus Aurea*, meaning Golden House. The historian Suetonius describes it in all its gaudy immensity as follows:

![Image](612x457 to 622x801)
“A huge statue of [Nero], 120 feet high, stood in the entrance hall; and the pillared arcade ran for a whole mile. An enormous pool, more like a sea than a pool, was surrounded by buildings made to resemble cities, and by a landscape garden consisting of ploughed fields, vineyards, pastures, and woodlands — where every variety of domestic and wild animal roamed about. Parts of the house were overlaid with gold and studded with precious stones and mother-of-pearl. All the dining rooms had ceilings of fretted ivory, the panels of which could slide back and let a rain of flowers, or of perfume from hidden sprinklers, fall on his guests. The main dining room was circular, and its roof revolved slowly, day and night, in time with the sky.”

Nero’s home marked an attempt to install a countryside villa in the heart of Rome, as if George Bush had had his Texas ranch erected within the borders of Washington, DC. The impracticality of this venture was met with some hostility, but Nero was not alone in this tasteless idealization of large, ostentatious edifices.

During Augustus’s reign, a proto-Rococo craze emerged for bizarrely colored marble constructions, such as violet spotted marble pilasters alongside red, yellow, and green columns. One rich man filled his private reservoir with water shipped from the Dead Sea. Luxurious baths featured silver faucets and ceilings covered in crystals along with mosaics, statues, and pillars. The Emperor Hadrian’s villa displayed copies of buildings and monuments from around the world.

The wealthy were not content to merely own one such dwelling. Certain men could effectively travel throughout Italy and stay in their own homes at every stop. A fourth-century senator owned at least 16 homes scattered throughout the empire. Cicero, a famous Roman statesman and lawyer, owned eight large villas in addition to a number of smaller homes along main roads. Besides the enormous amount of capital required for the construction and upkeep of these — usually empty, homes — colossal estates put a strain on Rome’s resources by absorbing large swaths of otherwise farmable land.

Another consequence of this building mania was that individuals incurred massive debt. It was not uncommon for the rich to spend irresponsibly and beyond their means, and Rome had a thriving creditor market. Nobles who found themselves on the verge of bankruptcy could actually go before the senate and make a case for government bailouts, which were, at times, granted. Others who could not face the shame of poverty sought another way out: when a man named Marcus Gabius Apicius had whittled his fortune down to the modern equivalent of $100 million — having previously accumulated ten times that amount — he killed himself, unable to face the prospects of living with so few resources!

Nero’s Rome was a society of excesses on both ends of the economic spectrum; the enormous wealth of the few contrasted with the destitute poverty of the many. While the base cost of living was relatively inexpensive, and a class of professionals was able to attain a certain degree of wealth, hard, gritty labor was the norm for the poor, and violent crime was prevalent. The gap between the rich and the poor was one of the great strains placed on the slowly crumbling Empire. Perhaps, if ancient Romans had been able to look back upon the collapse and failure of a previous decadent society, they would have been able to foresee and prevent their own fall. Perhaps.
I never set out to write comic plays. My themes as a writer are usually serious, even though the delivery is not. I'm often asked about this, which forces me to think about why I write in this way and what comedy is and how it works on me. Each time I do this, it's with some caution: A writer's voice is like a fingerprint of the mind, conscious and unconscious—and it's dangerous to know too clearly what makes you tick. But when I sneak a peek between my fingers at my own process and voice, this much I see.

I wrote my first play, *Still Warm*, standing up at the cash register in the hotel bar where I was working as a waitress. After some pretty crushing years, it was becoming clear to me that my talents were too frail and my courage too limited to ever fulfill my dreams of being an actress. And time was running out. The first image of the first play I ever wrote was that of a woman in Hell crawling out of an overturned car where she'd just drowned in six inches of muddy water. She could get out of Hell if only she could renounce her ambition.

My play was about the newscaster Jessica Savitch, of course, not me. Although the piece was incredibly flawed, wild and ugly, it was alive. Painful, sure. But because it was born of a need to expose—and because exposure is bringing darkness to light—it had a macabre exuberance to it, and was, in its weird way, celebratory. Comedy always moves toward the light, even when a character might be moving into the dark.

In comedy, we deal with the unmanageable person within—the posturing ego, the inner crazy person, the howling child, the monster. When you write comedy, you must surrender your grandiosity and your aspiration to be thought important and beautiful, even though every person on the face of the Earth wants to be exactly that.

In *You, Nero*, which deals with the effect Nero had on the theatre scene in ancient Rome, I wrote a speech for the Ghost of Agrippina, the emperor's mother. It was modeled on the great death speeches in Shakespeare. I wanted it to have the flavor of Gertrude's description of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*. The speech is satire, of course, but how I worked on it! It took me days. The phrasing at times brought a thrill and a flush of pride. I cherished it. I studied similar speeches, listened to the assonance, the matching sounds, the changes in meter, and I learned from them. I chose my words with as much elegance and precision as I am capable of. And now, undercut by a key phrase or two, they will become a source of comedy in the play, delivered by an actor who is blessed by the Ridiculous Muse.

My point is, the nature of the investment in comedy is as whole-hearted and emotionally sincere, up to the final tweak of consciousness, as in high art or tragedy.

This is equally true for comic performance and production. When a stage comedy is playing really well, the performers and the audience go into a kind of altered state. There's a sense that nothing can go wrong. Huge choices are not too much, and tiny choices explode the house into sheer delight. Everything seems to communicate, and a willing suspension of disbelief allows us to buy anything. At the same time, no false goods are being sold to us. Good faith on both sides of the footlights abounds. It's fantastic to watch how an audience hangs on each thought of gifted farceurs and seems to read their intentions and inner life even in the way they draw breath...

But getting to that point of seeming effortlessness takes days and days of precision work. Previews are full of strange mysteries: Why did they laugh there? What was funny about that? Why didn't they laugh there? That should be funny.

Sometimes the answers are simple: They didn't laugh because they could see only one of the actor's eyes, and they need to see both. (That in itself is a mystery: For some reason, it's hard to land a laugh in profile.)

At other times, the line might not be funny (my fault) or it might be funny but not in a way that earns spontaneous laughs.
Amy Freed
production history

Still Warm
The Psychic Life of Savages
Freedomland (Pulitzer Prize finalist)
The Beard of Avon
Safe in Hell
Restoration Comedy

(also my fault). There's a variety of absurdity, for example, that works well on the page and in the rehearsal room but that flops on stage.

At still other times, the missing laugh has to do with the actor's delivery, which brings up a slew of intricate, maddening, fascinating questions about pacing, pausing, pointing by gesture after the key word, or sometimes before the word, more rarely on the word. The problem might be physical. An actor might diffuse a laugh by moving on the line — or diffuse another actor's laugh by moving on the line, or stepping on it. Some actors even do that on purpose, to deny a laugh to a colleague. Those actors, thankfully, are the exception.

Finally, the problem could be in the setup, which means it's either my fault, or the actor's, or the director's, or a combination — and we have to figure it out. The challenge is this: To set up a joke requires stabilizing the audience's attention in a misdirected focus, so that the departure of consciousness — the unexpected juxtapositions upon which comedy depends — can come with the force of surprise and delight. This requires control of the audience's attention and expectation, and it's both an art and craft. It's practically science. And it's why, incidentally, I have no great love of the "wacky," which to me is a low and unskilled glancing at comedy, depending on winking attitude and screwball sets to signal wit but with none of the real clarity of attitude that wit requires.

The work is never-ending. The question is not only can we get it right, but can we get it right in time? I'm writing this between rehearsals for You, Nero — rehearsals that, I hasten to add, are going well. I have the deep and humbling pleasure of seeing some of the finest actors in the country (seriously) lending themselves to the realization of my fantasia — and a terrific and unflappable director, Sharon Ott, coping with the task of actualizing a script that calls for leopards, sea battles, gladiatorial contests, and the burning of Rome. But I know that, no matter what comedy you're staging, if you were to stop the rehearsal in mid-process, half the jokes would be lost, along with the show's overall themes and impact. The trial and error and rigor of what we're doing now are what's required to bring out everything that's in this comedy. We'll be ready for you when the doors open, and working every second until then.

An old comedian supposedly once said that "dying is easy, comedy is hard." Let's amend that cliché, once and for all, and say that comedy is seriously one great reason to stay alive. As anyone who ever took a theatre history class remembers, the origins of comedy are festival. It comes out of the celebration of fecundity, fertility, the defeat of winter by the spring. Laughter is a fountain of renewal. It's not physiologically possible to really laugh and be in pain at the same time (which is probably why the old comedian was making wisecracks on his deathbed).

And yet comedy is intricately mixed up with pain, from the early delight a child experiences in watching someone else take the pratfall: A pratfall, by definition, is somebody else's problem.

And so: A dog makes a meal of a cream pie. Buster Keaton spots the dog, whose muzzle is now dripping with whipped cream, and thinks the dog is rabid. Buster takes off at a dead run, and the dog, excited, chases him around and around a construction sight. The chase includes the dog crawling up a ladder after Buster and continuing the pursuit around the perimeter of an uncompleted house. At the end of the short (The Scarecrow), you want to stand up and cheer both performers, human and canine, for their commitment, athleticism, and ability to transform hydrophobia and panic into anesthetizing comic ecstasy.

My hat's off to the comics and the comedians who help keep our nightmares at bay.

Nero was born Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus in 37 AD. His mother, Agrippina (sister of the notorious Caligula), married Emperor Claudius. Lucius was officially adopted by Claudius at age 13 and became Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus, heir to the throne.

In 53 AD, Nero married his stepsister Claudia Octavia. Less than a year later, Emperor Claudius died, possibly by poison at the hand of Agrippina, and at the age of 16, Nero was established emperor.

His early reign was strongly influenced by his mother and his tutors, Seneca and Burrus. Competition quickly arose among the three; Nero responded by becoming progressively more powerful and impeding all possible rivals.

In 58 AD, Nero became involved with Poppaea, the wife of a friend. While there are reports that Nero ordered the death of his mother the next year in order to divorce Octavia and marry his mistress, it is unlikely, as Nero did not marry Poppaea until 62 AD. Historians theorize that Nero executed Agrippina in response to her plotting against him. Octavia’s execution followed.

Ancient historians report that Nero, never having found wedded bliss, kicked Poppaea to death after she complained about his coming home late from the races. Modern historians suspect bias against Nero and propose that Poppaea actually died from childbirth complications.

Nero’s policies were often designed to garner support from the masses, and he was criticized for being obsessed with popular opinion. He lowered taxes on the poorer classes, imposed restrictions on fees, supported the rights of freed slaves, and arrested numerous government officials on charges of extortion and corruption. He also enacted a series of wide-reaching and expensive public works projects.

Nero had a great love of entertainment, and built a number of gymnasia and theatres. He held enormous gladiatorial shows and established his own festival, the aptly named Neronia. Nero was known to sing and perform in public, much to the dismay of ancient historians. They felt it was shameful, believing theatre was for the lower class and led to immorality and laziness.

Did Nero fiddle while Rome burned? No, the fiddle wasn’t invented until after Nero’s death. There was a great fire in Rome during his reign, but historical accounts vary widely as to where Nero was and what he was doing. The etymology of the phrase is traced to the 17th century, and refers to his predilection for performance and the suspicion the Roman people had that Nero did not do everything he could to stop the fires, as he subsequently took advantage of the cleared space to build himself an enormous “Golden Palace,” complete with an artificial lake.

Nero’s demise was imminent after being declared a public enemy by the senate. He prepared for suicide but lost his nerve and ordered one of his companions to commit suicide first. Finally, at the sound of the approaching carriage, Nero plunged a dagger into his throat. His last words were, “What an artist the world loses in me.”
IN THE BOOK THE LIVES OF THE TWELVE CAESARS, ROMAN historian Suetonius describes Nero as “about the average height, his body marked with spots and malodorous, his hair light blond, his features regular rather than attractive, his eyes blue and somewhat weak, his neck over thick, his belly prominent, and his legs very slender.”

“Nero at this time was at Antium, and did not return to Rome until the fire approached his house...However, to relieve the people, driven out homeless as they were, he threw open to them the Campus Martius and the public buildings of Agrippa, and even his own gardens, and raised temporary structures to receive the destitute multitude. Supplies of food were brought up from Ostia and the neighboring towns, and the price of corn was reduced to three sesterces a peck. These acts, though popular, produced no effect, since a rumor had gone forth everywhere that, at the very time when the city was in flames, the emperor appeared on a private stage and sang of the destruction of Troy.”—Tacitus, Annals

Early Christian writings foretell Nero’s return as the Anti-Christ. These may have been fueled by reports that Nero was one of the first to persecute Christians. In his Annals Tacitus wrote, “To get rid of the report (that he had ordered the burning of Rome), Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace...Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car.”

Nero has been portrayed many times on the silver screen, often by well-known actors. Peter Ustinov played the emperor in the 1951 film Quo Vadis, based on the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz. Charles Laughton played him in Cecil B. DeMille’s 1932 film The Sign of the Cross. In a 1955 Bugs Bunny cartoon called “Roman Legion-Hare,” Nero was drawn to resemble Laughton. (Nero also appeared in a Daffy Duck cartoon and in an episode of “Peabody’s Improbable History” on the Rocky and Bullwinkle series.) In the 1976 BBC television adaptation of Robert Graves’ I, Claudius (which aired on PBS in the US) Nero was played by Christopher Biggins. And Dom DeLuise played Nero in Mel Brooks’ History of the World, Part I.

After building his Golden Palace as a result of the Roman fires, Nero reportedly said “that he could finally start living like a human being.”

From the Historian’s History of the World: “It is said that [Nero] never traveled with less than a thousand attending him with his baggage: the mules being all shod with silver, and their drivers dressed in scarlet clothes of the finest wool; and a numerous train of footmen, and Africans, with bracelets on their arms, and mounted upon horses in splendid trappings.”

Odds and Bitter Ends and Nero: Emperor, Artist, Entertainer, Monster were originally written for South Coast Repertory. Reprinted with permission.
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Aurélia Thierrée in Aurélia's Oratorio
PHOTO BY RICHARD HAUGHTON
You, Nero

WRITTEN BY
AMY FREED

DIRECTED BY
SHARON OTT

MAY 15–JUNE 28, 2009
THRUST STAGE • MAIN SEASON

YOU, NERO IS PERFORMED IN TWO ACTS, WITH A 15-MINUTE INTERMISSION.

SETTING: ROME, 64 AD

CAST
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Scribonius of Carthage
Jeff McCarthy*

Burrus, Beppo & Batheticus
Mike McShane*

Fabio, Oxus, Octavia’s Ghost & Young Nero
Kasey Mahaffy*

Seneca, Zippo & Patheticus
Richard Doyle*

Nero
Danny Scheie*

Agrippina
Lori Larsen*

Poppaea
Susannah Schulman*

Ensemble
Donnell Hill
Maggie Mason
Sarah Moser

PRODUCTION STAFF

Scenic Design
Erik Flatmo

Costume Design
Paloma H. Young

Lighting Design
Peter Maradudin

Original Music & Sound Design
Stephen LeGrand
Eric Drew Feldman

Stage Manager
Julie Haber*

Casting
Amy Potozkin
Joanne DeNaut

New York Casting
James Calleri

You, Nero is performed in two acts, with a 15-minute intermission.

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Originally commissioned and developed by South Coast Repertory.

2008-09 • NUMBER 7 • THE BERKELEY REP MAGAZINE • 27
JUNE 27, 2009–MARCH 28, 2010

For the first time in 30 years, the artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamun return to the de Young Museum. This exhibition presents more than 130 important objects, including 50 from the tomb of King Tut and places the Egyptian ruler in a larger context through an additional 80 objects from the tombs of his ancestors.

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Images (Left to Right):
- Coffinette for the Viscera of Tutankhamun, Dynasty 18. 39.5 x 10 cm. Inlaid Pectoral Spelling out the Name of the King, Dynasty 18. 9 x 10.5 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Photo: Andreas F. Voegelin, Antikenmuseum Basel and Sammlung Ludwig.

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Richard Doyle
SENECA, ZIPPO & PATHETICUS
Richard is a founding artist at South Coast Repertory, and has received numerous Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Awards and nominations for his work at scr and elsewhere in the Los Angeles area. Cheer fans will remember him as Woody's father-in-law Walter Gaines, and he has many other film and television credits. As a voice-actor, he has become a familiar voice in commercial advertisements, video games such as Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots, documentaries, and animated series. Listen for him as Pops in the Regular series. Jeff on Nickelodeon, as Hogar the Troll in the animated feature Clutch Powers, and as Lycomedes in the new interactive Jason and the Argonauts. Richard is the holographic host at the Union Theater at the Lincoln Library in Springfield, IL.

Donnell Hill
ENSEMBLE
Donnell is thrilled to make his professional debut at Berkeley Rep. He was last seen as Costard in Love's Labor's Lost at Stanford University under the direction of Karin Coonrod. His previous roles include Actor/Aeneas in The Waste Land in Black and White, Canada in Harlem Duet, Danny in Stanford: Real World, Soldier in Frenzy for Two or More, and Justin/Ensemble in Amy Freed's Restoration Comedy. Donnell, a senior at Stanford, will shortly graduate with a BA in drama.

Maggie Mason
ENSEMBLE
Maggie is happy to be back at Berkeley Rep after performing as an understudy in Mary Zimmerman's The Arabian Nights. She was last seen as Beth in TheatreWorks' Bay Area educational tour of Oskar the Bully, and before that as Jenny in the American premiere of Stephen Brown's Future Me with TheatreFirst. Her other roles include Emma in The Heavy Hand at Stage Werx Theatre, Maire in Translations at Stanford Summer Theatre, and Stella in The Collection at Stanford's Pinter Festival. In England she played Gemma Lyons on BBC's Grange Hill for three seasons prior to college. She was a founding member of the Stanford Shakespeare Society (now Company), the only year-round student-run ensemble theatre company in the nation, and served as artistic director for two years. Maggie graduated from Stanford University with a BA in drama and English literature.

Lori Larsen
AGrippina
You, Nero is Lori's Berkeley Rep debut, in the role she recently created at scr. She is a 2004 Fox Foundation Fellow, a founding member of the Empty Space Theatre, and a proud member of Actors' Equity for 33 years. Lori is based out of Seattle, and has performed on all the leading stages in the Northwest, including numerous productions at A Contemporary Theatre, Fifth Avenue Theatre, Intiman Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. Her other regional credits include Madame Arcati in Blithe Spirit at a.c.t., Noises Off at Civic Light Opera of South Bay Cities, The Underpants at the Alliance Theatre, Wit at Madison Repertory Theatre, and Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? at Tacoma Actors Guild. Lori played Mrs. Le Fleur on Northern Exposure, and recently acted in an independent feature film, William Never Married.

Kasey Mahaffy
FABIOLO, OXUS, OCTAVIA'S GHOST & YOUNG NERO
Kasey is making his Berkeley Rep debut with this production, reprising the role he originated at scr. Kasey has also appeared at Berkshire Theatre Festival, Ensemble Theatre Company, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, the Macha Theatre in Los Angeles, Oregon Cabaret Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts, Pioneer Theatre Company, Portland Center Stage, Sonnet Repertory Theatre in New York City. Kasey's film and television credits include Crossing Jordan, ER, Girlfriends, Joey, Medium, Ocean's 13, Veronica Mars, and a new series in development called is This Thing On?

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Stephanie Buchner

Fight Director
Dave Maier
Mike McShane
BURRUS, BEPPO & BATHETICUS
Mike is happy to be back at Berkeley Rep after appearing in Waiting for Godot in 1989, and is eager to put Tony, Sharon, and Amy’s generosity to the test. He is especially proud of his past associations with Berkeley Rep and the Eureka Theatre in the ’80s, as well as a c.a.t. and California Shakespeare Theater. Mike has been a regular on Whose Line is it Anyway?, and portrayed Audrey II in Little Shop of Horrors in London’s West End. With David Amram, he recited Jack Kerouac’s On the Road for the British Library’s celebration of the book’s 50th anniversary, and costarred with Sir John Gielgud and Rosemary Harris in A Summer Day’s Dream for BBC. In the US, Mike was in the recent American premiere of Dumb Show and Cyrano de Bergerac with Susannah Schulman, both at scr. He has been a recurring character on ER and Seinfeld, and is a proud member of The Antaeus Company, LA’s classical ensemble.

Sarah Moser
ENSEMBLE
Sarah is proud to make her Berkeley Rep debut in You, Nero. Her previous credits include Restoration Comedy, written and directed by Amy Freed, and Don Juan, directed by Edward Iskandar, at Stanford Summer Theater. Sarah was an active member of the Stanford Shakespeare Company, where she performed in As You Like It, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado About Nothing, and the new work adaptation Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief. Sarah has a BA from Stanford.

Danny Scheie
NERO
Danny’s previous Berkeley Rep credits include Les Waters’ production of Charles Mee’s Fêtes de la Nuit and Tony Taccone’s production of Cloud Nine, which transferred to Trinity Repertory Company. Danny has acted at Cal Shakes for the past five seasons, including the role of Lord Foppington in Amy Freed’s Restoration Comedy, which he reprised at The Old Globe in San Diego. His regional acting and directing credits include work at Asolo Repertory Theatre, Chicago’s Free Shakespeare Company, Los Angeles Theatre Center, The Metropolitan Opera, A Noise Within, Pasadena Playhouse, scr, Seattle Shakespeare, Yale Repertory Theatre, and Zephyr Theatre. He has received numerous Bay Area Critics Circle awards for acting and directing; his local credits include Aurora Theatre Company, Campo Santo, Center Repertory Theatre, Josie’s Cabaret and Juice Joint, Marin Theatre Company, The Marsh, San Francisco Shakespeare Company, San Jose Rep, Theatre Rhinoceros, TheatreWorks, and 13 seasons at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, where he was the artistic director from 1992–1995. Danny has a PhD in drama from UC Berkeley.

Susannah Schulman
POPPAEA
Susannah’s previous Berkeley Rep credits include The House of Blue Leaves and Continental Divide, which also played at csf and The Barbican in London. Her other credits include All’s Well That Ends Well and Rough Crossing at Yale Rep; Bad Dates and The Two Gentlemen of Verona at Geva Theatre Center; How Shakespeare Won the West at the Huntington; Les Liaisons Dangereuses at Syracuse Stage; Cyrano de Bergerac, The Dazzle, The Further Adventures of Hedda Gabler, Man From Nebraska, Nostalgia, On the Mountain, Six Degrees of Separation, and The Taming of the Shrew at scr; and Picnic at Marin Theatre Company. Susannah has also appeared in the national tour of Steve Martin’s Picasso at the Lapin Agile, five seasons at Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and six seasons at Cal Shakes, where she is an associate artist.

Amy Freed
PLAYWRIGHT
Amy is the author of The Beard of Avon, Freedomland, The Psychic Life of Savages, Restoration Comedy, Safe in Hell, and other plays. Her work has been produced at a.c.t., Cal Shakes, the Goodman Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons, scr, Seattle Rep, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Yale Rep, and many other theatres around the country. Amy has been the recipient of the Joseph Kesselring Award and the Charles MacArthur Award. She has won the LA Drama Critics Circle Award multiple times, and was a Pulitzer Prize final for Freedomland.

Sharon Ott
DIRECTOR
Sharon has been a leading figure in American theatre for 25 years—including 13 years as Berkeley Rep’s artistic director, during which the company achieved national prestige and a Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Following her tenure in Berkeley, Sharon
served Seattle Rep as its artistic director for nine years. Her New York credits include work at Manhattan Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, and The Public Theater; she has worked regionally at Arena Stage, the Huntington, the Mark Taper Forum, Opera Colorado, San Diego Opera, Seattle Opera, scr, and many others. In these theatres, she has collaborated with contemporary American artists including Ricardo Chavira, Willem Dafoe, and Anna Deavere Smith; directors Joe Mantello, Stephen Wadsworth, George C. Wolfe, and Mary Zimmerman; and authors Nilo Cruz, Amy Freed, Philip Kan Gotanda, Beth Henley, and August Wilson. She is the recipient of multiple Bay Area Critics Circle and Dramalogue Awards, an Elliot Norton Award, an Obie Award, and the Paine Knickerbocker Award for Lifetime Achievement. Sharon is currently a professor at the Savannah College of Art and Design and serves on the national executive board of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

Julie Haber
STAGE MANAGER
Julie is delighted to return to Berkeley Rep, where she previously stage managed Ballad of Yachiyo, also directed by Sharon Ott. At scr, she recently stage-managed You, Nero as well as Dead Man's Cell Phone, A Feminine Ending, Goldfish, and Taking Steps. Other regional credits include work at The Alley Theatre, Dallas Theater Center, the Guthrie, La Jolla Playhouse, The Laguna Playhouse, Long Wharf, The Old Globe, Seattle Rep, Yale Rep, and ten productions at a.c.t., including Lockawanna Blues and James Joyce’s The Dead, during her three-year tenure there as administrative stage manager. She was the company stage manager at SCR for 20 years, stage-managing over 70 productions and overseeing the stage management department. She has also stage-managed two operas: Don Juan in Prague at Prague’s Estates Theatre and at bam in 2006, and Guest from the Future at Bard SummerScape. Julie received her MFA from Yale School of Drama and has taught stage management at Cal Arts, UC Irvine, and Yale.

Erik Flatmo
SCENIC DESIGNER
Erik designed the set for You, Nero at scr. His regional credits include work at a.c.t., Asolo Rep, Cal Shakes, Magic Theatre, San Jose Rep, and Yale Rep. In New York, he has worked with companies such as The Civilians, Dance Theater Workshop, Danspace Project, Kitchen Theatre Company, and The Play Company. Upcoming projects include a new musical dance piece with choreographer Joe Goode and projects with San Francisco Opera's Merola Program. He is a graduate of Columbia University and the Yale School of Drama. He currently teaches set design at Stanford University.

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Paloma H. Young
COSTUME DESIGNER
Paloma’s recent credits include 1,001 at Mixed Blood Theatre, Charlotte’s Web at scr, Dos Pueblos at Miracle Theatre Group, Brooklyn Boy and Sweet 15 at San Diego Repertory, A Midsummer Night’s Dream at The Old Globe, The Adoption Project at Mo `olelo Performing Arts Company, The Uneasy Chair at North Coast Repertory Theatre, and the Page to Stage productions of Peter and the Starcatchers and A Current Nobody at La Jolla Playhouse. Paloma holds an MFA in theatre from UC San Diego and a BA in American history from UC Berkeley.

Peter Maradudin
LIGHTING DESIGNER
Peter has designed more than 30 previous productions at Berkeley Rep, including Ballad of Yachiyo, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, Closer, The First 100 Years, Homebody/Kabul, Mad Forest, The Oresteia, Serious Money, and The Woman Warrior, among others. On Broadway he designed the lighting for Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom and the Pulitzer Prize-winning The Kentucky Cycle. Off-Broadway credits include Ballad of Yachiyo, Bouncers, and Hurrah at Last. Peter has designed over 300 regional productions at a.c.t., the Guthrie, the Huntington, La Jolla Playhouse, the Old Globe, osf, SCR, Seattle Rep, Steppenwolf, the Taper, and others. He is a founding principal member of firstcircle, a lighting design consultancy for architecture, hospitality and themed environments with projects spanning the globe.

Stephen LeGrand
ORIGINAL MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN
Stephen has designed music and sound for theatres throughout the country including the Alliance Theatre, the Huntington, La Jolla, MTC, The Public, Roundabout Theatre Company, Seattle Rep, and the Taper. He served as resident sound designer at A.C.T. for 12 years before relocating to Savannah, where he teaches at the Savannah College of Art and Design. Previous designs for Berkeley Rep include Lulu, Macbeth, Serious Money, The Tooth of Crime, and Volpone. More recently, he and Eric Feldman designed the sound and music for Amy Freed’s Restoration Comedy at Cal Shakes.

Eric Drew Feldman
ORIGINAL MUSIC AND SOUND DESIGN
Eric has played with everyone from Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band, Pere Ubu, The Residents, and Snakefinger to Frank Black (sometimes known as Black Francis), the Pixies, and PJ Harvey. He has also produced records for Deus, Frank Black Francis, The Polyphonic Spree, Sparklehorse, and Tripping French food for the soul
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Daisy. He is currently touring the known world with PJ Harvey and recording the second album for his band knife & fork. Along with Stephen LeGrand, he has composed scores and designed sound for productions at A.C.T., La Jolla, The Taper, Playwrights Horizons in New York City, SCR, Seattle Rep, and Berkeley Rep, where his credits include The Birthday Party, The Flying Doctor, Lulu, In Perpetuity Across the Universe, The Tooth of Crime, The Rivals, Serious Money, The Speed of Darkness, Volpone, and Yankee Dawg You Die.

South Coast Repertory Co-producing theatre
South Coast Repertory, founded in 1964 and continuing today under the leadership of Artistic Directors David Emmes and Martin Benson, is widely regarded as one of America’s foremost producers of new plays. In its three-stage Folino Theatre Center in Costa Mesa, California, SCR produces a five-play season on its Segerstrom Stage, a four-play season on its Argyros Stage, plus two annual holiday productions. SCR also offers a three-play Theatre for Young Audiences series, and year-round programs in education and outreach. SCR’s extensive new play development program consists of commissions, residencies, readings, and workshops, from which up to five world premiers are produced each season. Among the plays commissioned and introduced at SCR are Donald Margulies’ Sight Unseen, Collected Stories and Brooklyn Boy; Richard Greenberg’s Three Days of Rain, Everett Beekin, Hurrah at Last, and The Violet Hour; David Henry Hwang’s The World of Shakespeare; and Anne Washburn. His Berkeley productions include the world premieres of Pillowman and the premiere of Tiny Kushner. In 2004, his production of Continental Divide transferred to the Barbican in London after playing at SCR, Berkeley Rep, La Jolla Playhouse, and England’s Birmingham Rep. His many regional credits include Actors Theatre of Louisville. Arena Stage, Arizona Repertory Theatre, the Eureka Theatre, Hartford Stage, the Huntington, The Public, San Jose Rep, Seattle Rep, and Yale Rep.

Susie Medak Managing Director
Susie has served as Berkeley Rep’s managing director since 1990, leading the administration and operations of the Theatre. She is president of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the national management association that represents seventy-five of the country’s largest non-profit theatres. She served two terms on the board of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), where she served three years as treasurer. Susie has served on many National Endowment for the Arts’ Program panels and has chaired two panels for the Massachusetts Arts Council. Closer to home, she chairs the Downtown Berkeley Business Improvement District, and is on the board of the Downtown Berkeley Association. She is the founding chair of the Berkeley Arts in Education Steering Committee for Berkeley Unified School District and the Berkeley Cultural Trust. Susie is on the faculty of the Yale School of Drama and is a proud member of the Mont Blanc Ladies’ Literary Guild and Trekking Society; she lives in Berkeley with her husband and son.

Les Waters Associate Artistic Director

Madeleine Oldham Dramaturg
Madeleine is Berkeley Rep’s literary manager and resident dramaturg. As literary manager and associate dramaturg at Baltimore’s Centerstage, she produced the First Look reading series, and headed up its young audience initiative. Before moving to Baltimore, she was the literary manager at Seattle Children’s Theatre, where she oversaw an extensive commissioning program. She also acted as assistant and interim literary manager at Seattle’s Intiman Theatre. Madeleine recently completed four years of service on the executive committee of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas, and has also worked with ACT/Seattle, Austin Scriptworks, Crowded Fire Theatre Company, Geva Theatre Center, the Kennedy Center, the Neo-Futurists, and Portland Center Stage.

Amy Potozkin Casting Director
Amy is in her 19th season with Berkeley Rep, where she serves as artistic associate and casting director. She has also had the pleasure of casting for ACT/Seattle, Aurora, Arizona Theatre Company, Bay Area Playwright’s Festival, Dallas Theatre Company, Marin Theatre Company, San Jose Rep, Social Impact Productions Inc, A Traveling Jewish Theatre, and Charlie Varon’s play Ralph Nader is Missing at the Marsh. Amy cast roles in the films Conceiving Ada, starring Tilda Swinton, and the Josh Kornbluth film HAIKU TUNNEL. She has been a coach to hundreds of Bay Area artists, and led organizational team-building workshops for Biotech Partners and Maxxcomm. She received her MFA from Brandeis University, where she was also an artist-in-residence.

The Strauch Kulhanjian Family Executive Producers
Roger Strauch is a sustaining trustee and former president of the Board of Trustees of Berkeley Rep. He is chairman of The Roda Group (rodagroup.com), a venture development company based in Berkeley, best known for launching Ask.com, PolyServe, and Sightspeed. Roger is on the board of directors of Game Ready and Cardstore.com, located in the East Bay. Roger is a member of the engineering dean’s college advisory boards of Cornell University and UC Berkeley, an executive member of the board of trustees for the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute in Berkeley and a co-founder of the William Saroyan Program in Armenian Studies at Cal.
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Roger is an executive member of the Piedmont council of the Boy Scouts of America. His wife, Julie A. Kulhanjian, is an attending physician at Oakland Children's Hospital. They have three teenage children.

Shirley D. & Philip D. Schild  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Philip and Shirley moved to the Bay Area after retiring in 1985. As a professor of medicine (gastroenterology) at UCSF and UC Davis, Phil volunteered his services at hospitals and clinics in San Francisco and the East Bay for 20 years. Shirley still volunteers as an art librarian at the Oakland Museum of California. Their first cultural experience in the Bay Area was a performance at Berkeley Rep and they have been ardent supporters ever since. They are also enthusiastic supporters of Cal Performances, Oakland East Bay Symphony and, of course, the Oakland Museum. They are especially pleased to be involved with Berkeley Rep productions as they have attended almost every performance since 1985 and have introduced many family and friends to the Theatre.

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If you'd like to donate any of these items, please contact the Theatre at 510 647-2900.

**Offices & Shops**
- Computers (working Pentium III or higher PC systems)
- Laser printer — color or B&W
- LCD monitors

**Marketing**
- Letter-folder
- Portable desktop multimedia projector
- Portable audiovisual screen
- Slide scanner

**Scene Shop**
- Industrial metal punch/shear
- Electro-pounce machine

**Prop Shop**
- Cargo van
- Antique furniture (in good condition)
- Bedazzler
- Small vintage items (in good condition)
- Unused lumber
- Database management system
- New hand/power tools:
  - 14V Dewalt cordless drills
  - Pneumatic pop-riveter
  - MIG welders
  - Plasma cutter

**Lighting & Sound**
- Pentium laptop computer
- 15” flat-screen computer monitors

**Education**
- Piano bench
- Children’s books and plays
- Electric keyboard
  (with 61+ piano-sized keys)

**General**
- Passenger vehicle or pick-up truck
  (in good condition)
- Office desk chairs
- Pro bono auto mechanic work
- Reference books for literary department
- Stacking in/out trays
- Two-drawer lateral file cabinet
- Stereo headphones (for the hearing impaired description service)
- Dry-erase board (24” x 36” or smaller)
- Dry-erase “year at a glance” wall calendar

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**Theatre info**

**Emergency exits**
Please note the nearest exit. In an emergency, walk — do not run — to the nearest exit.

**Accessibility**
Both theatres offer wheelchair seating and special services for those with vision-or hearing impairment. Infrared listening devices are available at no charge in both theatre lobbies. Audio descriptions are available in the box office; please request these materials at least two days in advance.

**Ticket exchange**
Only subscribers may exchange their tickets for another performance of the same show. Exchanges can be made online until midnight (or 7pm by phone) the day preceding the scheduled performance. Exchanges are made on a seat-available basis.

**Educators**
Call 510 647-2972 for information about $10 student matinee tickets, classroom visits and teaching artist residencies, teacher training workshops, post-show discussions, teacher study guides, backstage tours, and more. Call 510 647-2949 for information on discount subscriptions for preschool and K-12 educators.

**Theatre store**
Show-related books and Berkeley Rep merchandise are available in the Hoag Theatre Store in the Roda Theatre or our kiosk in the Thrust Stage lobby.

**Considerations**
Please keep perfume to a minimum. Many patrons are sensitive to the use of perfumes and other scents.

Recycle and compost your waste
Help us be more green by using the recycling and compost containers found throughout the Theatre.

Beepers / phones / recordings
Please make sure your pager, cell phone, or watch alarm will not beep. Doctors may check pagers with the house manager and give seat location for messages. Use of recording equipment or taking of photographs in the theatre is strictly prohibited.

Please do not touch the set or props
You are welcome to take a closer look at the set, but please don’t step onto the stage. Some of the props can be fragile, and are placed precisely.

No children under seven
Many Berkeley Rep productions are unsuitable for young children. Please inquire before bringing children to the Theatre.

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**Under 30 discount**
Half-price advance tickets for anyone under the age of 30 for all shows, based on availability. Proof of age required.

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Tickets are just $10 each. Call the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre at 510 647-2972.

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