Discover our 2015–16 season  
16  ·  Shining a light on Tarell Alvin McCraney  
20  ·  The program for Head of Passes
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THE BERKELEY REP MAGAZINE
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Together we’ll go far
Tragedy is the end of narrative. I’m not talking about fictional tragedy, the stories we make up to describe terrible events. I’m talking about the experience itself, the encounter with an unexplained loss so painful as to send us into endless grief. The kind of loss that provokes the most obvious and most profound question: Why? Why did it happen? Why him, why her, why them, why me, why us????? Posing the question implies that there is an answer, and the eternal lack of an answer forces us to live in a different way: without a story that sufficiently explains why, without a narrative that makes sense, without a way for us to create meaning....

It seems to me that that moment, the moment we come face to face with tragedy, is the place where faith resides. Not religious faith, necessarily, but faith in anything that allows us to keep living, something that provides either distraction or comfort or meaning. Something that quiets the mind, stills the body, and fills the spirit. The options are many, from God to family to art to commerce to sports to alcohol.... We are very creative/destructive when it comes to figuring out ways to survive the next day. And in the same way that tragedy marks us, so does our choice of faith. Who we choose to become in this life is defined by the way we seek solace from suffering.

Which brings us to Head of Passes, the newest play from the astonishingly gifted Tarell Alvin McCraney. Never short on ambition, Tarell has written a play about faith for people of every persuasion, from those adhering to orthodox religious principles to fervent atheists. Set in Louisiana at the mouth of the Mississippi River, the story is focused on an elderly African American woman named Shelah Reynolds, whose powerful life force is centered on her love for her family and her unshakeable belief in God. Her religion resides comfortably at the core of her being, providing guidance and solace and humor as she moves through the challenges of running a business and supporting her children.

But in the blink of an eye, Shelah’s world is completely upended. A torrential wave of natural and unnatural events is unleashed upon her, with little to no explanation. As the chrysalis of her tragedy unfolds, we watch her struggle to redefine her life. A life without common understanding. A life without a narrative. Beyond rational thought and overrun with feeling. Shelah Reynolds is thrust into a world she does not know. And she pulls us along with her. She invites us into the arms of our own suffering. Into the wellspring of what lies beyond us. Into the arms of faith.

Sincerely,

Tony Taccone
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KATHIE LONGINOTTI
REaltor® and Berkeley Rep Subscriber

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In my neighborhood, everything is in bloom. Perennials have re-seeded and are just now showing their greenery. All those bulbs I planted last year are beginning to poke through the soil. There’s a reason, beyond the sheer beauty, that I revel in a spring garden. I love the daily reminder that my investment of past effort is so richly rewarded with vivid growth!

Spring is a time for growth and bloom at Berkeley Rep too, as evidenced by that wondrous moment every year when our magnificent wisteria transforms the Narsai M. David Courtyard. Spring is also the time of year when our fellows, the 15 young theatre practitioners whom we have collectively mentored since last August, start their own annual ritual. They start blooming too. They land jobs at theatres from Southern California to New York, and several end up working here at Berkeley Rep. Some will go on to creative jobs in other fields. This year is no different. We’ll be sending this year’s crop of fellows off to run small theatres and to be staff members at larger companies. And we’re proud of them all. We’ve been doing this for a long time, and we can look across our field with great delight at the impact our investment has reaped in artists, artisans, and administrators working in theatres across this country.

But this is also a time of year when people make individual choices that are about growth and transition. We have two staff members in particular who have set this spring as a moment to make profound change. Karen Racanelli, who has been our general manager for almost 20 years, has decided that it is time to take on a new challenge, which for her will mean working to expand Hershey Felder’s already prodigious artistic empire! Although our audience members may not realize her impact, all of us at Berkeley Rep will feel her loss even as we wish her well. Kitty Muntzel, who has draped almost every woman’s costume on our stage for 25 years, has decided that it is time to put away her shears and start learning some new skills. Kitty’s career in our costume shop has brought accolades from colleagues, from designers, and from actors who have worn her clothes throughout more than two decades on our stages.

Berkeley Rep is, at its core, about people. If we are good, it is because our people are good. We take enormous pride in the quality of our staff and in the value that they all place on learning, teaching, and doing. All that learning, all that teaching is in the service of producing high-quality theatre. And it is an honor to produce that work for all of you.

Warmly,

Susan Medak

from the Managing Director
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FINANCIAL AID AVAILABLE
Making a splash: The secrets to showcasing water onstage

By Amy Bobeda

The human body is composed of roughly 60 percent water. As a necessary life force, good old H₂O can bring us both comfort and fear. We need water to survive, yet it can drown us in seconds. At Berkeley Rep, water has proved quite a dramatic scene partner. Sometimes water portrays a character, other times a mood or feeling. In Head of Passes, is the rain just a representation of the Mississippi Delta climate or is it the hand of God incurring wrath upon the protagonist? In Pericles, Prince of Tyre, the storm drives the prince off course, rewriting his tale. Water serves as an emotional memory of ocean tides in Sarah Ruhl’s Dear Elizabeth. No matter the story, water can play quite a role on Berkeley Rep’s stages.

Water needs special consideration and extra rehearsal time. Before it can touch an actor, stage water is chemically treated to prevent mold and bacteria growth, in turn creating a corrosive environment for the scenery’s steel framing. And at Berkeley Rep, our scene shop artisans carefully plan the ways we can reuse and recycle the water in our productions.

Faking the natural effects of rain or flooding requires extensive research and development. In the early days of Hollywood, artists would portray rain with milk, because the translucent white liquid would read on film, and actual water wouldn’t. In theatre, we can use actual water, but like all things onstage, it’s more complicated than simply turning on a hose.

The last time Berkeley Rep’s Thrust Stage received a shower was in the 2013 production of Mark Wing-Davey’s Pericles, Prince of Tyre. The storm scene featured actress Anita Carey spraying down the prince’s boat with a fire hose—a simple and effective moment fueled by some serious engineering.

The stage was designed like a giant wooden shower. Each segment of flooring was individually waterproofed, and then caulked to the next when installed, creating waterproof floor seams. This prevented leaks that could cause structural damage to the stage’s subfloor. The stage itself had a small incline, encouraging water to drain in the same direction, much like a gym shower. The minimalist set design allowed for the use of a tarp backdrop, which kept water from reaching beyond the sliding door hidden behind the tarp — but just to be safe, the crew rolled towels under the sliding door each night to stop any leaks from traveling upstage. A tank lived beneath the stage, and water cycled through the drainage system onstage, filtered back into the tank, and pumped through the hose—eight times a week.

Pericles also gave the costume department a wet and wild ride. The designer’s vision of both timeless and contemporary clothing left some leeway in the storm scene, but after the pressurized dousing, they learned that vintage military
rain slickers are not always waterproof. Actors were provided insulated underclothes and warm, dry costumes to change into immediately after the storm.

Another recent work of water, *Dear Elizabeth* provided entirely different challenges for the production staff. To accompany the imagery of Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell's poetry, there was a system of rivers and tides onstage, creating an upstage downpour and a downstage rising tide.

The mechanics behind the downpour were rather simple. The top of the set featured a trough, similar to a gutter. Before the show, the crew would turn on one of two tanks that fed the trough from the trap room. The gutter would fill to the brim, and then they'd turn it off. When the stage manager called the cue, they would turn the pump on, and the trough would overfill, spilling over onto the stage, just like an overflowing bathtub.

A Plexiglas lip was installed at the front of the stage to prevent water from flowing into the audience. Just behind the Plexiglas was another trough beneath a grate that was painted to match the floorboards. When cued, the second tank would turn on and push the water 25 feet straight up from beneath the stage, creating the effect of a rising tide. For the audience, the visual was both startling and beautiful, as sound and projections transported them to the seashore, yet the set remained grounded in the characters' respective homes.

The scene shop artisans had to ensure there wasn't any water damage to the three-walled set. The flooring was built of marine-grade plywood to prevent swelling and buckling. The walls had twice as many load-bearing studs as usual, and a pond liner was set between the show floor and the actual stage to prevent water damage.

Unlike in *Pericles*, the actors in *Dear Elizabeth* hardly got wet. We provided duplicates of their shoes and Elizabeth Bishop's handbag, but for the most part they remained dry.

*Dear Elizabeth* and *Pericles* have prepared our production departments for the waterworks of *Head of Passes*. Despite the fact that this is the last show to grace the Thrust Stage before this year's renovation, no one has thrown caution to the wind. The furniture has waterproof liners beneath the upholstery. The costumes are machine washable. A drying rack for rugs has been set up in the Roda for use between shows. Without giving away too much story, or theatre magic: it will rain, it will pour, and the earth will move—we hope it moves you too.
If you’re an avid patron of the arts in Berkeley, it’s likely you’ve experienced the architecture of Donn Logan and Marcy Wong. They have designed a number of local performance venues including those of our neighbors Freight & Salvage and the Jazzschool (now called California Jazz Conservatory), and they’ve led the renovations of the Crowden School and Zellerbach Hall’s mezzanine café and lobby.

So when it came time to begin planning the renovation of Berkeley Rep’s signature Thrust Stage, it was only natural to bring this husband/wife team on board.

“Donn and Marcy have been involved with Berkeley Rep for over 25 years,” says Managing Director Susie Medak. “We have a shorthand with them that means we don’t have to explain everything. Donn has volunteered his time as a member of our facilities committee for as long as I’ve been here, and he understands the dynamic of how we make choices.”

Donn was the chief architect of the Roda Theatre and designed the 600-seat proscenium house to be in relationship to the Thrust Stage. “Keeping the brick façade consistent and uniting the two theatres with a central courtyard was important,” he says. “And now with the renovation of the Thrust, the new box office is an opportu-
nity to both create a focus and identity for Berkeley Rep that also has the practical advantage of patron way-finding and circulation."

Marcy continues, “Our aim is to refresh the Theatre’s public spaces, and upgrade the technical aspects including lighting and acoustical. What will be most noticeable to patrons will be the visual improvements, like new finishes and lighting in the Theatre’s public spaces. But what will have greater impact are the acoustical improvements, which will make the space much more pleasant. Patrons won’t be specifically aware of all the reasons that the environment feels better.”

Meyer Sound’s Constellation Acoustic System will bring the Thrust Stage up to the 21st century with state-of-the-art sound technology and design. It will give sound designers nearly unlimited range in creating specific environments to help advance a play’s narrative. And for audiences, the system will provide an unparalleled level of audibility and clarity, no matter the seat location.

As Susie says, “It’s been fantastic working with Donn and Marcy to reimagine how the Thrust can be upgraded to serve the needs of today’s audiences and artists.”

The first phase of renovation was completed last year by transforming the space that was most recently the costume shop into a bar where patrons can enjoy cocktails, light bites, and refreshments before, during, and after a performance. Now construction is underway for the expanded box office, which will unite the Thrust and the Roda with its central location in the courtyard. Come June, the Thrust will undergo its makeover, reopening in late winter/early spring of 2016.

Originally designed by the late Gene Angell, who was also the architect for the neighboring Aurora Theatre, the Thrust Stage is heralded for its intimacy. But after 35 years of wear and tear, the theatre is in need of attention. “The ‘bones’ of the place will remain the same,” assures Marcy. “Just a ‘face lift’ is happening.”

The Thrust Stage renovation project is being funded through contributions to the Create Campaign, Berkeley Rep’s $50 million comprehensive campaign which also funds the development of its Harrison Street campus into a center for new work and supports the Annual Fund through 2017.

To make a gift in support of Berkeley Rep’s plans, visit berkeleyrep.org/create
Being their best selves

Story Builders helps young students around the Bay Area

BY KASHARA ROBINSON

“Once upon a time” Anansi the Spider was walking, walking through the forest when something caught his eye. On any given day, you may hear these same words ringing down the halls of Bay Area elementary schools. Imagine a classroom of first graders circled around as one student crouches low, pretending to be a moss-covered rock along Anansi’s path. What you see is Story Builders in action!

Story Builders, one of the Berkeley Rep School of Theatre’s most popular K–12 programs, is an interactive elementary school workshop that uses the fundamentals of theatre to explore literature. Students practice critical thinking, self-expression, and communication skills as they bring stories and universal themes to life with the help of a professional teaching artist.

Although students and their teacher can experience the workshop in a one-hour visit, the demand for longer residencies continues to increase yearly. Thanks to partnerships between the School of Theatre and outside organizations, many classrooms are diving into storytelling on a deeper level due to an ongoing commitment to support residencies within local schools. This year, for example, Berkeley Public Schools Fund is granting at least one 10-hour residency in each of the 11 public elementary schools in Berkeley, while Target underwrote 10 10-hour workshops this fall for schools in Oakland and Emeryville.

Some schools, such as Marshall Elementary in San Francisco and Olinda Elementary PTA, directly arrange multiple residencies for their teachers.

What makes these collaborations so impactful is the ability to provide the more in-depth engagement that comes with multiple visits per class. So what is it like to be in the classroom, unlocking the Story Builders curriculum with a rambunctious group of first graders over the course of several weeks? Who better to ask than the teaching artists themselves? Berkeley Rep Teaching Artist Elena Wright paints the picture:

As a teaching artist, what is the benefit of conducting a multiple-hour residency compared to a single one-hour workshop?

With a residency, we actually get to work on risk-taking, team-building, and repetition of skills that we establish in the beginning. Just like anything, the more time we can invest, the further we can go.

Over the course of time, what skills do you see the students developing?

Each class and each child is different. Sometimes, it’s the shy kids who get to find their voice. Their confidence grows as...
they take bigger risks, and they are rewarded for it. Sometimes it’s the student that the teacher warns me about at the beginning of class who may have behavioral issues that ends up learning how to focus all that energy into a character and ends up being a model performer. Or it may be that the entire class learns how to share focus and problem-solve as a group. There are so many mental muscles being used: text analysis, imagination, memorization, teamwork, taking risks, reading comprehension, and ultimately, integrating all of those skills into one focused, committed performance.

**What is your favorite Story Builders book to teach?**

My usual response would be *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock* because there is a satisfying amount of repetition—all the characters get tricked, and the kids get to say “KPOM” and fall down. Repeatedly. Now we have a new story, *Lucha Libre*, that I love teaching for many of the same reasons. It’s very theatrical. The kids get to play over-the-top characters, there is some trickery and secrets, and they get to pretend to have a wrestling match. Hard to beat that one!

**What do students most respond to in the workshop curriculum?**

Just like adults, they respond to subversive elements and the darker side of things. Characters that lie, fight, and don’t behave the way they’re supposed to. They love getting to embody those characters, and I love letting them in a safe environment. There is always a lesson in those stories that the kids easily relate to.

**Do you have a memorable example of a moment of impact with a student?**

There’s almost always one “problem” student in every group—the kid who’s too loud, acts out, is the class clown, or wants attention all the time—and almost without fail, that kid is the one with the “gift.” That student is the one who has all the ingredients of a skilled performer. Most of their classroom career they are told “no,” or that they are “too much.” Once that student finds a place where those things could be seen as gifts that not everyone naturally has, they often become fearless leaders who help guide the group to a strong performance. This happens frequently.

**Is theatre important in the classroom?**

The most important thing people get out of theatre is compassion. Theatre involves taking risks, being vulnerable, and putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. There are lots of characters with “bad” qualities. Kids learn to have compassion not only for the characters they play, but also for their fellow classmates and for themselves. It’s practicing the delicate art of being human in difficult circumstances, and kids get to practice being their best selves.
The Ground Floor selects 14 projects for its Summer Residency Lab

BY JULIE MCCORMICK

The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep’s Center for the Creation and Development of New Work is thrilled to announce the 14 projects it has selected for the fourth Summer Residency Lab. As the umbrella for all new play activity, The Ground Floor seeks to enhance and expand the processes by which Berkeley Rep makes theatre. This includes supporting our numerous commissioned artists and developing shows for the season, as well as The Ground Floor’s flagship program, the Summer Residency Lab. By inviting diversely talented artists to work on new projects at any stage of the creative process, the lab promotes vital crosspollination among artists and champions the spirit of innovation inherent to Berkeley and the Bay Area.

This June, some of the nation’s most prominent and promising writers, directors, designers, and composers will unite at the Theatre’s campus in West Berkeley. Dozens more local and out-of-town actors and directors will join the lab, bringing the number of participating artists close to 100.

“We are incredibly excited about this year’s Summer Lab artists,” says Madeleine Oldham, director of The Ground Floor and resident dramaturg at Berkeley Rep. “From commissioned artists and returning friends to brand new faces, we feel as though we’re living up to our promise to ourselves to build as diverse and rigorous a creative atmosphere as possible. Playwrights, designers, musicians, directors, actors, and solo performers will come together in a rare opportunity to imagine alongside each other. In the world of our incubator, a salsa nightclub act about an assassination attempt on Fidel Castro can grow alongside a multidisciplinary adaptation of a Murakami story, or a play that explores international adoption with puppets. Now in the fourth year of the Summer Lab, we feel as though we’re hitting our stride.”

2015 SUMMER RESIDENCY LAB ARTISTS

César Alvarez and Lucas Hnath: Castro
Christopher Chen and Mei Ann Teo: Passage
Julia Cho and Liesl Tommy: Aubergine
Jackie Sibblies Drury: Untitled
Anne Galjour: The Alligator Ball
Rinne Groff: Fire in Dreamland
Eric Hoff, Will Davis, and SK Kerastas: Color Guard (working title)
Jamie Hook: Rules to Follow in Cloud Engineering
Naomi Iizuka and Rachel Dickstein: Sleep

Hansol Jung: Wolf Play
Sean Christopher Lewis and Jennifer Fawcett: Ghost Story
Anais Mitchell: Hadestown
Peter Sinn Nachtrieb and Danny Scheie: A House Tour of the Infamous Porter Family Mansion with Tour Guide Weston Ludlow Londonderry
Annie Smart: The Summer Play

To learn more about the Summer Lab and this year’s projects, visit our website at berkeleyrep.org/summerlab
Join the party in our new Osher Studio on Center Street with a delightfully immersive, lovingly loopy, and fantastically eccentric 80-minute take—think banjos, beach balls, and guitars—on Gilbert and Sullivan’s preposterous, topsy-turvy world. Frederic was mistakenly apprenticed as a young boy to a band of sentimental pirates. Now 21, he falls head-over-heels for the Major-General’s daughter and forswears the buccaneer’s life forever, or so he thinks. This buoyant, award-winning Pirates of Penzance by Chicago theatre rebels The Hypocrites is “spirited, affectionate, and nearly irresistible,” says the Boston Globe.

Amélie
Book by Craig Lucas · Music by Daniel Messé
Lyrics by Nathan Tysen & Daniel Messé
Musical direction by Kimberly Grigsby
Choreographed by Sam Pinkleton
Directed by Pam MacKinnon
Limited Season · Roda Theatre
Aug 2015 · World premiere

Amélie captured our hearts in the five-time Academy Award–nominated film. Now she comes to the stage in an inventive and captivating new musical directed by Tony Award winner Pam MacKinnon (Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?) and penned by Craig Lucas (Prelude to a Kiss), with a stirring score by Daniel Messé (of the acclaimed band Hem) and lyrics by Nathan Tysen (The Burnt Part Boys) and Messé. Embark on a mesmerizing journey with inquisitive and charmingly shy Amélie as she turns the streets of Montmartre into a world of her own imagining, while secretly orchestrating moments of joy for those around her. After discovering a mysterious photo album and meeting a handsome stranger, she realizes that helping others is easier than concocting a romantic story of her own. After seeing the world through the magical and enchanted eyes of Amélie, you’ll never look at life the same way again.

The Hypocrites’ Pirates of Penzance
Book by W. S. Gilbert · Music by Arthur Sullivan
Directed and adapted by Sean Graney
Co-adapted by Kevin O’Donnell
Co-directed by Thrisa Hodits
Music direction by Andra Velis Simon
Limited Season · Osher Studio · Oct 2015

Join the party in our new Osher Studio on Center Street with a delightfully immersive, lovingly loopy, and fantastically eccentric 80-minute take—think banjos, beach balls, and guitars—on Gilbert and Sullivan’s preposferous, topsy-turvy world. Frederic was mistakenly apprenticed as a young boy to a band of sentimental pirates. Now 21, he falls head-over-heels for the Major-General’s daughter and forswears the buccaneer’s life forever, or so he thinks. This buoyant, award-winning Pirates of Penzance by Chicago theatre rebels The Hypocrites is “spirited, affectionate, and nearly irresistible,” says the Boston Globe.
The world premiere of Amélie, Mary Zimmerman’s Treasure Island, the Pulitzer Prize–winning Disgraced, a thrilling Macbeth, a fantastical Pirates of Penzance, and more — your adventure awaits!

PLUS ONE MORE PLAY TO BE ANNOUNCED! FOR MORE INFO, CLICK BERKELEYREP.ORG

**Disgraced**

By Ayad Akhtar  
Directed by Kimberly Senior  
Main Season · Roda Theatre  
Nov 2015 · West Coast premiere

Amir Kapoor is living the American Dream — an upper East Side apartment, Italian suits, and the promise of becoming partner at the law firm. But when he and his wife Emily, an artist influenced by Islamic imagery, host a dinner party for their friends and colleagues, lies and deception threaten to shatter Amir’s carefully constructed life of cultural assimilation. Playwright Ayad Akhtar won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for this engrossing and combustible drama that probes the complexity of identity, the place of faith in today’s world, and the hidden prejudices still alive in liberal society. Director Kimberly Senior comes to Berkeley Rep to stage the provocative play that she shepherded from Chicago to London to its triumphant run on Broadway.

**Aubergine**

By Julia Cho  
Directed by Liesl Tommy  
Main Season · Thrust Stage  
Feb 2016 · World premiere

An estranged son, a father who’s ill, a visiting uncle carrying their memories in tow, a woman without an appetite, and a refugee from a forgotten country — they all prove potent ingredients in this bittersweet and moving meditation on family, forgiveness, and the things that nourish us. When language fails, when the past fades, the perfect meal transcends time and culture and says more than words ever can. Julia Cho’s plays have garnered critical praise from New York to Los Angeles. Now she pairs with Obie Award–winning director Liesl Tommy (Ruined and Party People) on the elegant, poignant, and lyrical Aubergine.

**Treasure Island**

Written by Robert Louis Stevenson  
Adapted and directed by Mary Zimmerman  
Main Season · Thrust Stage  
Apr 2016

Mary Zimmerman has mesmerized audiences with her exquisite adaptations of classic tales from the spellbinding Arabian Nights to the hypnotic White Snake. This spring the Tony Award–winning director takes us aboard the Hispaniola for a heart-pounding voyage filled with tales of swashbuckling gentlemen o’ fortune, a malicious mutiny led by infamous Long John Silver, and a deadly quest for fabled buried booty. Caught in the middle is cabin boy Jim Hawkins, who must find uncommon courage as he faces a murderous plot and navigates the ambiguous tides of morality. Sail to Treasure Island with Mary Zimmerman for another visually tantalizing and exhilarating adventure.

**Macbeth**

By William Shakespeare  
Directed by Daniel Sullivan  
Main Season · Roda Theatre  
Feb 2016

Tony and Obie Award–winning director Daniel Sullivan — dubbed the go-to guy for Shakespeare — helms a thrilling new production of the bard’s murderous play about the lust for power and the fickleness of fate. Driven by an evil prophesy and his scheming wife, Macbeth kills the king and claims his crown, thus beginning a moral descent into a reign of terror. The New York Times has called Daniel Sullivan’s Shakespeare in the Park productions “absolutely splendid” and rendered with “passion, expertise and uncommon intelligence.” We can’t wait to reveal who will play the notorious couple — stay tuned!
THE HEAD OF PASS ATURBU GEogra

by lexı diamond

louisiana
In southernmost Louisiana, where the three passages of the Mississippi River join the Gulf of Mexico, lies a stretch of ever-shifting wetlands called the Head of Passes. It is here, in this stormy and mysterious region, that this story takes place.

On a map, the area looks like strange lace: a system of rivers, swamps, and marshes coil off from the three main rivers of the Mississippi, weaving in and out of one another to reveal the occasional landmass. Only 10 percent of what little land that does poke through the labyrinth of channels is dense enough for human use; the rest is sand, silt, and clay that shifts constantly with the movement of the waters. As a result, the region is very isolated, and though it lies just 75 miles south of New Orleans, only a single, solitary road stretches down from the bustling home of Mardi Gras to the “toe” of the boot-shaped state.

The shape of the coastline is vulnerable to the many turbulent currents that converge at the Head of Passes. Those currents are unpredictable, crashing in from different directions at varying speeds. Since the 1930s, nearly 2,000 square miles of the coast of Louisiana has been swallowed up into the Gulf; that’s an area nearly the size of Delaware. More erodes every day, and it is estimated that Louisiana loses an acre of land every 33 minutes.

The wetlands break up surging flood waters and hurricanes like speed bumps, and as they disappear, they can no longer provide the protection they once did for the land to the north. When Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, it came through the Head of Passes first, devastating the area and turning vast stretches of wetland into open water. Those landmasses that once served as blockades to oncoming storms were devoured by the onslaught, leading to the devastation of levees and floodwalls further inland and allowing tens of billions of gallons of water to spill into New Orleans. Katrina was the largest and third strongest hurricane to ever make landfall in the United States, with winds up to 175 miles per hour, and a storm surge 20 feet high. Roughly 100,000 homes in the region were destroyed, and the final death toll came to 1,863. Some communities affected by the storm are still recovering from its destruction to this day.

Despite the remote and volatile nature of the Head of Passes, there are still some who make their homes there. They take gravel roads that stretch out from the highway to sporadic communities of houses, many of which belong to families who have lived in Louisiana for generations. They make their way to work on the ports, docks, and barges that sparsely line the swampy coasts. They adjust their way of life to the fluctuation of the bayou, and fortify their homes after each storm as they await the next.
Playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney’s star is on the rise, and for good reason. With a master’s in playwriting from Yale, he is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, a resident playwright at New Dramatists, and at the tender age of 33 won a MacArthur “Genius” Award. His writing celebrates the vulnerability and imperfection of the human condition with an ear for music and an eye for physical poetry. This intuitive grasp of the geography of the human heart has sent him and his plays all over the globe, to theatres like the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court, and the Public Theater. Before rehearsals started in Berkeley, Tarell took some time to speak with Literary Associate Julie McCormick about the journey of Head of Passes and his own voyages as a playwright.
Julie McCormick: How much would you say the piece has changed and grown since its first production at Steppenwolf? What feels different to you now?

Tarell Alvin McCraney: I feel like it’s gotten deeper. And it’s easy to say that a lot has changed, though if people saw both productions they would only notice the changes incrementally. But for us, I think the production has gotten deeper and more focused.

Has your thinking about the piece changed at all after having seen it with an audience?

Absolutely. The idea of opening up the dialogue about a person’s personal faith was and is always the main focus of the piece. And then trying to find ways to make sure that visceral conversation was open to everybody in the audience, believers and non.

Do you think that everyone has a relationship with faith?

I think people have a relationship in that everyone either believes in belief or doesn’t. I think there are people who choose to say that they don’t know, but there’s still a sort of relationship with the notion of faith. We’re all trying to make sense of the world we live in. And sometimes, we turn to the word “faith” as the sort of coin, or short answer, for that question. But, everyone has a relationship to trying to figure out the chaos of our world.

You said that part of your initial impetus in creating this piece was examining the nature of faith—can you say a little bit more about where this piece came from for you?

The piece was a commission by Steppenwolf. Tina Landau asked if I was interested in the Book of Job. And I said, generally, yes. But specifically, I don’t know what I’m interested in, I just know that I am interested in it. And then we spent two weeks with a cast just reading the Book of Job out loud and then trying to decipher its makeup. When we walked away from it, my takeaway, again, was that it is a story about someone’s personal faith, and how they use it as an aperture or a guide to try and understand the many, many, sometimes fraught, sometimes beautiful, often chaotic events of our lives. Of human existence. Period. Not just our lives, but other people’s lives.

And what is that struggle? To maintain an ability to not know all the answers, but also to try not to abandon the notion of life. To really stay in it, to figure out what you know, and what you don’t know, and what you never will know. Trying to find some balance in that, I think. We look at people’s lives every day. There’s a woman on TV every other day saying she’s lost her whole family or her home or her child is now fighting for ISIS or they just lost their children because someone thought they were gay, and then earthquakes open up and swallow people’s livelihoods....

There are moments of our lives where these things come out of nowhere, that we absolutely don’t understand and can’t quite find palpable and reasonable answers for. We look at the lives of our friends and think: why does that keep happening to that person? Or, how could all of this rain down on one person’s life? And I don’t have any answers to that. But I thought, and think—this is why we tell stories. I think we all have bouts of confusion and moments of disillusionment, and need to tell these stories to each other in order to find some commonality, some semblance of peace.

Could you say a little bit about the location, Head of Passes? Is that a spot you were familiar with before starting this play?

Yeah, I was familiar with it and became more familiar as I embarked on the project. I remember during Hurricane Katrina, someone said—it was someone from San Francisco—they said, why are those people living there? They know it’s below sea level. Why would they elect to live there? And I remember the person from New Orleans saying back to the person in San Francisco, you live on a fault line. You live in a place that countless times you been told it’s coming, but still you choose to live there, right? And I don’t live in either of those places, so I’m not on anybody’s side, but I think that question is important when we talk about where we set our hopes and our dreams, where we build our livelihoods. We tend to think that we are putting them in the most secure place that we can, and then of course, the Mississippi shifts, and then our lives shift forever. Irrevocably. And I think that’s an important lesson for all of us. We all think that we’re living in Topeka, Kansas where nothing can kind of go wrong, until a
"We look at the lives of our friends and think: why does that keep happening to that person? Or, how could all of this rain down on one person's life? And I don’t have any answers to that. But I thought, and think—this is why we tell stories."

tornado whips around and we land in Oz. It was important for me to set this in a place where there is natural beauty, but also that could shift and disappear at any time.

I think there is a sense of understanding—I’m from Miami, we never underestimate or overestimate the threat of a hurricane. It’s gonna do damage. What damage that is we don’t know, so there’s no need to over-prepare. There are things we cannot control. There are some times the wind will come in. No matter how much you board it up, there are still winds strong enough that can come in and rip your roof apart at the right angle. And you just know and live with that. It was important for me to set this family in a place where they are aware on a larger—I guess the word would be “natural,” level of the way the world can work and wants to work sometimes.

Have you always written for theatre, or have you written in other forms?

Always. Always for theatre.

Did you always know that you wanted to be a playwright, or were you attracted to the form itself?

I was an actor and a performer in the theatre all my life. So I’ve always written and created work for the theatre as I went along. I began to write only, solely, when I became about 24, 25. But up until that time I was also acting and directing.

Why do you think you were drawn so strongly to the theatre?

That’s always been a hard question to answer. I don’t really know. I know that it was an outlet early on, and that I took to it fairly swiftly. Not to say that I was good at it very early on—sometimes I don’t know if I’m good at it still—but, it’s just a process that I engaged with in a way that felt natural.

Where did you first encounter it?

Through school. After-school programs. Church.

Do you think that your experience as an actor and a director influences your writing at all?

Absolutely. I think other writers, a lot of whom I admire, come from a place of poetry and literary focus first. I don’t come from that background; I come from a performative background. If people are looking for long stage directions, for example, they get very upset because I don’t have any.

I think most actors, or at least the ones I’ve encountered, see the work on the page and know what to do next. My hope is that they will feel a collaborative invitation from the piece.

Can you talk about your process of working with director Tina Landau, and how your relationship with her has shaped this play?

Tina and I have now collaborated on about six different projects. And we have probably one of the easiest working relationships I’ve ever encountered. I can’t say the same for her—she’s had other collaborators that she’s worked as easily with—but being this early in my career and to have a partner as facile and focused as Tina is incredible. We speak a very sim...
ilar language; we come to the theatre in very similar ways although we come from vastly different backgrounds. Greatly to our benefit, I think we both have been open and experimental in trying to figure out what this play wants and needs. And you only can thank God for those kinds of small miracles. Because you can easily try to stay open to the process, and then everyone ends up on different sides of the field. We stayed open to the process and what we were looking for, and then ended up at the very same spot, if not away from each other by two feet. So it’s just been a fantastic way to work and Berkeley’s been so generous in allowing us the time and space to do that.

That sounds like a very special relationship with Tina, and very rare.

I think so. Again, I can’t compare it to anything because I was lucky enough to find it fairly early on, but I find it special.

There is one stage direction in Head of Passes that I wanted to ask you about. It says that the play is set in “the distant present.” What does that mean to you?

Well, rarely do you tell stories from the future. And if you do tell a story about the future, you have to tell it from something that’s already happened. Our consciousness doesn’t exist in the forward; it exists in the now and the telling of the past. So the point of storytelling in the theatre is always going to be from a place of, this story’s already happened. Or it’s happening just now, and it’s present but it’s distant. It’s not exactly today, it’s not exactly right here right now. We’re always in the theatre watching a story being told to us. And it’s just again another invitation to allow that distance to be there, but also for everybody to know that there are actors in the room with you telling you this story. And that’s equally as important as the story.

What’s some of the theatre that you enjoy the most? Who are the companies or playwrights that you find inspiring?

Um, dance. I like dance more than anything. Not to say that I don’t like theatre; I love theatre, I love watching theatre. I love watching great actors. But more than anything, I’m constantly inspired by dance.

Why do you think that is?

It has a vulnerability to it that is easily achieved, that we are always striving for in the talking theatre. And I just find that fascinating.

Do you think you would write for dance at all?

I try to all the time, but it’s a really difficult form to write for.

Are there any companies you particularly like?

Everything. I see a lot. Most recently I saw Kyle Abraham’s piece in LA. I thought that was incredible.

What’s up next for you after this piece? Do you have anything else coming down the pike?

Nope!

(Laughter). No.

Are you feeling good about that?

I’m very excited about that.
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CAST
Aubrey  Francois Battiste
Shelah  Cheryl Lynn Bruce
Crier  Jonathan Burke
Dr. Anderson  James Carpenter
Spencer  Brian Tyree Henry
The Angel  Sullivan Jones
Cookie  Nikkole Salter
Mae  Kimberly Scott
Creaker  Michael A. Shepperd

PRODUCTION STAFF
Scenic Design  G.W. Skip Mercier
Costume Design  Toni-Leslie James
Lighting Design  Scott Zielinski
Sound Design  Rob Milburn & Michael Bodeen
Casting  Amy Potozkin, CSA
Tara Rubin, CSA
Stage Manager  Leslie M. Radin

Head of Passes was commissioned by and its world premiere was presented at
Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Chicago, IL; Martha Lavey, Artistic Director and
David Hawkanson, Executive Director.

The actors and stage manager are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the
Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

Partial support of open captioning is provided by
Theatre Development Fund.
Francois Battiste
AUBREY

Francois has been seen on Broadway in Bronx Bombers (Circle in the Square), Prelude to a Kiss (Roundabout Theatre Company), and Magic/Bird (Longacre Theatre). His off-Broadway credits include Detroit '67 (the Public Theater), Broke-ology (Lincoln Center), The Good Negro (the Public, Obie Award, Lortel nomination), The Merchant of Venice and The Winter's Tale (New York Shakespeare Festival at the Delacorte), 10 Things To Do Before I Die (Second Stage Theatre), and Bronx Bombers (Primary Stage). Francois has also appeared in shows at Williamstown Theatre Festival, Sundance, Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Lookingglass, and Dallas Theater Center. His TV and film credits include HBO’s The Normal Heart, Person of Interest, The Good Wife, Are We There Yet?, Men in Black III, You Bury Your Own, Delivering the Goods, and One Week. Francois received a BS from Illinois State University and trained at BADA in Oxford and the Juilliard School.

Cheryl Lynn Bruce
SHELAH

Cheryl Lynn premiered in Tarell Alvin McCraney’s Head of Passes (Steppenwolf Theatre Company), Marcus Gardley’s The Gospel of Lovingkindness (Victory Gardens Theater), and her performances in Dnai Guría’s The Convert (McCarter Theatre Center, the Goodman Theatre, the Kirk Douglas Theatre) earned Joseph Jefferson and Ovation Award nominations and an NAACP Theatre Award in Los Angeles. Cheryl made her professional debut in Death and the King’s Horseman, directed by Nobel laureate author Wole Soyinka. Her Goodman credits include The Dreams of Sarah Breedlove, Each One As She May; Cry, the Beloved Country; All’s Well That Ends Well; Black Star Line; and Seneca’s Trojan Women. Other Chicago credits include The Great Fire and RACE (Lookingglass); Everyman, Intimate Apparel, and No-mathemba (Steppenwolf); The Grapes of Wrath (Steppenwolf, Cort Theatre, National Theatre U.K., La Jolla Playhouse); The Snow Queen, The Voice of Good Hope, and Eurydice (Victory Gardens); and Flyin’ West (Court). Her work in Northlight Theatre’s production of From the Mississippi Delta (Arena Stage, Hartford Stage, Circle in the Square Theatre) won Helen Hayes, Joseph Jefferson, and Connecticut Critics Circle Awards. Regional credits include Harriet Jacobs and Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (Kansas City Repertory Theatre), Gem of the Ocean (Ensemble Theatre Company), and The Story (Milwaukee Repertory Theater). Her film and television credits include Prison Break; There Are No Children Here; Separate But Equal; To Sir, with Love II; Stranger Than Fiction; Daughters of the Dust; and The Fugitive. A member of Teatro Vista, Chicago’s premier Latino theatre company, Cheryl Lynn will co-develop and direct La Habana, a musical tribute to the vibrant hub Latin Caribbean immigrants flooded to in Chicago during the 1960s and ’70s.

Jonathan Burke
CRIER

Jonathan is thrilled to make his Berkeley Rep debut. He was most recently seen as David Heard in Tarell Alvin McCraney’s Choir Boy at the Studio Theatre. His national tour credits include Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat (Zebulun; u/s Judah; u/s Joseph), Mary Poppins, A Christmas Story: The Musical, and Cats (Mungojerrie). Jonathan was seen off Broadway in the world premiere of Langston in Harlem (Junior Addict) at Urban Stages, as well as in Jazz A La Carte at the Apollo Theater. Regionally, some of his work includes Amazing Grace (Tyler) at Goodspeed Musicals, Hairspray (Seaweed) at the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, Rent (Angel) at the Hangar Theatre, The Wiz at Center Stage in Baltimore, and Dreamgirls at Portland Center Stage. He has been seen on television dancing on the TV Land Awards and on video in The Broadway Warm-Up. Jonathan holds a BFA from Ithaca College.

James Carpenter
DR. ANDERSON

James last appeared at Berkeley Rep in Pericles, Prince of Tyre and has performed in over 30 productions at the Theatre during his 12-year tenure as an associate artist. His other Bay Area credits include American Conservatory Theater, Aurora Theatre Company, Cutting Ball Theater, Magic Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, and TheatreWorks. He is currently in his 12th season as an associate artist with California Shakespeare Theater. His other regional credits include work at Arizona Theatre Company, the Huntington Theatre Company, Intiman Theatre, the Old Globe, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Yale Repertory Theatre. He is the recipient of the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle’s Barbara Bladen Porter award for excellence in the arts (and its Lifetime Achievement Award) and in 2010 was named a Lunt-Fontanne Fellow. James’ film and TV credits include Nash Bridges, Metro, and The Rainmaker, and the independent projects Presque Isle, Singing, and The Sunflower Boy.

Brian Tyree Henry
SPENCER

Brian appeared in Tarell Alvin McCraney’s trilogy The Brother/Sister Plays at McCarter Theatre Center, and The Brother/Sister Plays: The Brother/Sister Plays: The Broth-
er at Los Angeles’ Rogue Machine Theater (LA Drama Critics’ Award), and other regional credits include A Civil War Christmas at Long Wharf Theatre. He has appeared in film and on TV in Boardwalk Empire, The Knick, Puerto Ricans in Paris, The Good Wife, and Law & Order. Brian has been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award and received his MFA from Yale School of Drama in 2007.

Sulli

Brian appeared in Tarell Alvin McCraney’s trilogy The Brother/Sister Plays at McCarter Theatre Center, and The Brothers Size at the Public, The Studio Theatre, and the Alley Theatre. He also appeared at the Public in The Fortress of Solitude and the Public/New York Shakespeare Festival in Romeo and Juliet and Talk About Race. Brian’s Broadway credits include The Book of Mormon, and other regional credits include A Civil War Christmas at Long Wharf Theatre. He has appeared in film and on TV in Boardwalk Empire, The Knick, Puerto Ricans in Paris, The Good Wife, and Law & Order. Brian has been nominated for a Helen Hayes Award and received his MFA from Yale School of Drama in 2007.

Sullivan most recently appeared in Center Stage’s production of One Night In Miami as Cassius Clay—a role which he originated at Los Angeles’ Rouge Machine Theater (LA Drama Critics’ Award and NAACP Award). His other regional credits include Clementine in the Lower Nine at TheatreWorks (Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award nomination), Twelfth Night and Cinderella at African-American Shakespeare Company, and Intimate Apparel and References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot at AlterTheater. His TV and film credits include Parks and Recreation (NBC) and Stanistan (US). Sullivan is a recipient of the 2012 Princess Grace Award in Theater, and studied acting at Brown University and the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television.
This is Obie Award–winning actress and playwright Nikkole Salter’s debut performance at Berkeley Rep. Her off-Broadway credits include Tough Titty (the Paradise Factory), Inked Baby (Playwrights Horizons), and In the Continuum (Primary Stages). Nikkole’s regional credits include Stick Fly (Arena Stage/the Huntington Theatre Company), Gee’s Bend (Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park and Kansas City Repertory Theatre), Luck of the Irish (the Huntington), The Old Settler (Luna Stage), Jitney (the Studio Theatre), and In the Continuum (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company; Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park; Yale Repertory Theatre; Philadelphia Theatre Company; the Kirk Douglas Theatre; Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh; the Market Theatre, South Africa; and Baxter Theatre Centre, South Africa). Her film and television credits include Pride & Glory, The Architect, and The Unit, and the voice of Rockstar Game’s “Midnight Club: Los Angeles” character, Laticia. Nikkole is a graduate of Howard University and nyu’s Graduate Acting Program. Please visit nikkolesalter.com.

Kimberly Scott

Head of Passes marks Kimberly’s Berkeley Rep debut. She most recently played Anne in the world premiere of Familiar by Danai Gurira at Yale Repertory Theatre. She also appeared at Yale in Death of a Salesman as Linda Loman and as Molly Cunningham in August Wilson’s Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (Tony and Drama Desk Award nominations on Broadway). Kimberly spent five seasons at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, playing Mama Nadi in Ruined, Mistress Quickly in Henry IV, Part 2, and creating roles in American Night: The Ballad of Juan José by Culture Clash, Party People by UNIVERSES, and The Liquid Plain by Naomi Wallace, all part of American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle. Her off-Broadway credits include Mabou Mines’ Lear and The Gospel at Colonus (Gorky Art Theatre, Moscow). Her screen credits include Love and Other Drugs, Flatliners, and The Abyss, as well as many television credits. Kimberly returns to osf in June to be in the world premiere of Sweat by Lynn Nottage.

Michael A. Shepperd

Michael is currently the co-artistic director of LA’s multi-award-winning Celebration Theatre (celebrationtheatre.com), where his producing, directing, and acting credits include The Color Purple, Four, The Women of Brewster Place, Take Me Out, Coffee Will Make You Black, [title of show], and numerous others in his nine years with the company. Other Los Angeles credits include Choir Boy (Headmaster), Master Harold and the Boys (Sam, naacp Theatre Award for lead actor), Steel (John Henry, Ovation Award for lead actor), and Intimate Apparel (George, NAACP Theatre Award for Supporting Actor). Michael’s Broadway, off-Broadway, and other credits include Cathy Rigby is Peter Pan (Starkey); Little Shop of Horrors (Audrey Two); Caroline, or Change (Bus/Dryer); and Five Guys Named Moe (Big Moe). He has appeared on TV in NCIS, Wizards of Waverly Place, Hot in Cleveland, Up All Night, Monk, Criminal Minds, and a bunch more. Michael is also an accomplished voice-over artist.

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Tarell Alvin McCraney  
PLAYWRIGHT

Tarell’s plays include The Brothers Size, In the Red and Brown Water, and Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet. His other plays include Choir Boy and Wig Out!. He is the recipient of the Whiting Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, the Evening Standard Award, the New York Times Outstanding Playwright Award, the Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, the Windham Campbell Award, a 2013 MacArthur “Genius” Grant, and a Doris Duke Artist Award. Tarell is a graduate from the New World School of the Arts, the Theatre School at DePaul University, and the Yale School of Drama. He is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, a resident playwright at New Dramatists, and a member of Teo Castellanos/D-Projects in Miami.

Tina Landau  
DIRECTOR

Tina is a writer and director and an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, where her directing credits include Tarell Alvin McCraney’s Head of Passes and The Brother/Sister Plays, as well as The Wheel, Hot L Baltimore, The Tempest, The Time of Your Life (also at Seattle Repertory Theatre and American Conservatory Theater), The Diary of Anne Frank, The Cherry Orchard, Space (also writer, Mark Taper Forum and the Public Theater), and Charles Mee’s Berlin Circle and Time to Burn. Her New York credits include Bill Irwin’s David Shiner’s Old Hats (also act) and Mee’s Big Love and Iphigenia 2.0 (all Signature Theatre Company), Paula Vogel’s A Civil War Christmas (New York Theatre Workshop), McCraney’s Wig Out! (Vineyard Theatre) and In the Red and Brown Water (Public Theater), and Tracy Letts’ Superior Donuts and the musical Bells Are Ringing on Broadway. Her writing includes Space as well as Floyd Collins (bookwriter/director, Playwrights Horizons), Dream True (lyricist/bookwriter/director, Vineyard Theatre), and Beauty (writer/director, La Jolla Playhouse). Tina teaches regularly and has co-authored, with Anne Bogart, The Viewpoints Book.

G.W. Skip Mercier  
SCENIC DESIGNER

Most recently in the Bay Area, G.W. Mercier designed the sets and costumes for Old Hats by Bill Irwin and David Shiner at American Conservatory Theatre. On Broadway he designed the sets and costumes for Juan Darién: A Carnival Mass by Julie Taymor and Elliot Goldenthal at the Vivian Beaumont Theater, receiving a Tony Award nomination for scenery and two Drama Desk Award nominations for scenery and costumes. Off Broadway at the Vineyard Theatre, his work on Dream True by Tina Landau and Ricky Ian Gordon and Bed and Sofa by Polly Penn and Lawrence Klavan procured him two additional Drama Desk nominations for scenery. Regionally he was honored with the Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for Saroyan’s The Time of Your Life at ACT directed by Tina Landau. He also received the Daryl Roth Creative Spirit Award for Outstanding Talent and Vision in Design. He worked on dozens of play premiers in New York, including Dead Man’s Cell Phone by Sarah Ruhl at Playwrights Horizons, directed by Anne Bogart; Urban Zulu Mambo by Regina Taylor at Signature Theatre Company; Miracle Brothers by Kirsten Childs, directed by Tina Landau; and El’s Comin’, the work of Laura Nyro conceived and directed by Diane Paulus, at Vineyard Theatre, where he is a resident artist.

Toni-Leslie James  
COSTUME DESIGNER

Toni-Leslie’s Broadway credits include Lucky Guy; The Scottsboro Boys; Finian’s Rainbow; Chita Rivera: The Dancer’s Life; Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom; King Hedley II; One Mo’ Time; The Wild Party; Marie Christine; Footloose; The Tempest; Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992; Angels in America: Millennium Approaches & Perestroika; Chronicle of a Death Foretold; and Jelly’s Last Jam. She has received a Tony nomination, three Drama Desk nominations, four Lucille Lortel nominations, a Hewes Design Award and four additional nominations, a Connecticut Critics Circle Award, an Irene Sharaff Young Masters Award, and the 2009 Obie Award for Sustained Excellence in Costume Design. Toni-Leslie is head of design at Virginia Commonwealth University. (In memory of our beloved son, Jett Gerald Higham, 3/15/1995–7/2/2013.)

Scott Zielinski  
LIGHTING DESIGNER


Rob Milburn & Michael Bodeen  
SOUND DESIGNERS

Rob and Michael composed music and designed sound for Berkeley Rep’s productions of Red Hot Patriot, No Man’s Land, and Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, and designed sound for Comedy on the Bridge/Brundibar. Their Broadway credits include music composition and sound for Waiting for Godot & No Man’s Land, Breakfast at Tiffany’s, The Miracle Worker, and One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, and sound for Larry David’s Fish in the Dark, This Is Our Youth, Of Mice and Men, Superior Donuts, reasons to be pretty, A Year with Frog and Toad, King Hedley II, Buried Child, The Song of Jacob Zulu, and The Grapes of Wrath. Their off-Broadway credits include music and sound for Sticks and Bones, The Notebooks of Leonardo Da Vinci, and Marvin’s Room; sound for JITney and The Pain and the Itch; and music direction and sound for Ruined. Rob and Michael have created music and sound at many of America’s resident theatres (often with Steppenwolf Theatre Company) and at several international venues. Please visit milbomusic.com.

Amy Potozkin, CSA  
CASTING DIRECTOR/ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE

This is Amy’s 25th season at Berkeley Rep. Through the years she has also had the pleasure of casting plays for ACT (Seattle), Arizona Theatre Company, Aurora Theatre Company, B Street Theatre, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Dallas Theater Center, Marin Theatre Company, the Marsh, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Social Impact Productions Inc., and Traveling Jewish Theatre. Amy cast roles for various indie films, including Conceiving Ada, starring Tilda Swinton; Haiku Tunnel and Love & Taxes, both by Josh Kornbluth; and Beyond Redemption by Britta Sjogren. Amy received her MFA from Brandeis University, where she was also an artist in residence. She has been a coach to hundreds of actors, has taught acting at Mills College and audition technique at Berkeley Rep’s School of Theatre, and has led workshops at numerous other venues in the Bay Area. Prior to working at Berkeley Rep, she was an intern at Playwrights Horizons in New York. Amy is a member of CSA, the Casting Society of America.

Tara Rubin, CSA  
CASTING

Tara has been casting at Yale Rep since 2004. Her upcoming Broadway projects include Bullets Over Broadway and Aladdin, and past Broadway productions include A Time To Kill; Big Fish; The Heiress; One Man, Two Guvnors (U.S. casting); Ghost; How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying; Promises, Promises; A Little Night Music; Billy Elliot; Shrek;
Guys and Dolls; The Farnsworth Invention; Young Frankenstein; The Little Mermaid; Mary Poppins; Les Misérables; Spamalot; Jersey Boys; The 25th Annual Putman County Spelling Bee; The Producers; Mamma Mia; The Phantom of the Opera; and Contact. She has cast for the off-Broadway shows Love, Loss, and What I Wore and Old Jews Telling Jokes. Tara has also worked for the Kennedy Center, La Jolla Playhouse, Dallas Theater Center, the Old Globe, Westport Country Playhouse, and Bucks County Playhouse. Her film work includes Lucky Stiff and The Producers.

Leslie M. Radin
STAGE MANAGER

Leslie is very pleased to be back at Berkeley Rep after most recently stage managing Troublemaker, or the Freakin’ Kick-A Adventures of Bradley Boatright and assistant stage managing An Audience with Meow Meow, Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike, and Chinglish (both here and at the Hong Kong Arts Festival). She started at Berkeley Rep as the stage management intern in 2003 and has also worked at American Conservatory Theater, Aurora Theatre Company, Center Rep, and the New Victory Theater in New York, where she traveled with Berkeley Rep’s production of Brundibar/But the Giraffe. Her favorite past productions include In the Next Room (or the vibrator play), Passing Strange, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Pillowman, and The Secret in the Wings.

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DIRECTOR/MICHAEL LEIBERT
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

During Tony’s tenure as artistic director of Berkeley Rep, the Tony Award–winning nonprofit has earned a reputation as an international leader in innovative theatre. In those 18 years, Berkeley Rep has presented more than 70 world, American, and West Coast premieres and sent 23 shows to New York, two to London, and one to Hong Kong. Tony has staged more than 35 plays in Berkeley, including new work from Culture Clash, Rinde Eckert, David Edgar, Danny Hoch, Geoff Hoyle, Quincy Long, Itamar Moses, and Lemony Snicket. He directed shows that transferred to London, Continental Divide and Tiny

The 25th Annual Putman County Spelling Bee

BY LANFORD WILSON
DIRECTED BY TOM ROSS
STARTS APRIL 17

A bittersweet portrait of the Woodstock generation at the precise moment they realize the fireworks ended yesterday.
**Kushner**, and two that landed on Broadway as well: *Bridge & Tunnel* and *Wishful Drinking*. Prior to working at Berkeley Rep, Tony served as artistic director of Eureka Theatre, which produced the American premieres of plays by Dario Fo, Caryl Churchill, and David Edgar before focusing on a new generation of American writers. While at the Eureka, Tony commissioned Tony Kushner’s legendary *Angels in America* and co-directed its world premiere. He has collaborated with Kushner on eight plays at Berkeley Rep, including last season’s *The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures*. Tony’s regional credits include Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, Center Theatre Group, the Eureka Theatre, the Guthrie Theater, the Huntington Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Public Theater, and Seattle Repertory Theatre. As a playwright, he debuted *Ghost Light, Rita Moreno: Life Without Makeup*, and *Game On*, written with Dan Hoyle. In 2012, Tony received the Margo Jones Award for “demonstrating a significant impact, understanding, and affirmation of playwriting, with a commitment to the living theatre.”

**Susan Medak**
**MANAGING DIRECTOR**

Susan has served as Berkeley Rep’s managing director since 1990, leading the administration and operations of the Theatre. She has served as president of the League of Resident Theatres (lort) and treasurer of Theatre Communications Group, organizations that represent the interests of nonprofit theatres across the nation. Susan chaired two panels for the Massachusetts Arts Council and has also served on program panels for Arts Midwest, the Joyce Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Closer to home, Susan chairs the downtown Berkeley Association (dba). She is the founding chair of the Berkeley Arts in Education Steering Committee for Berkeley Unified School District and the Berkeley Cultural Trust. She was awarded the 2012 Benjamin Ide Wheeler Medal by the Berkeley Community Fund. Susan serves on the faculty of 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.

**Karen Racianeli**
**GENERAL MANAGER**

Karen joined Berkeley Rep in 1993 as education director. Under her supervision, Berkeley Rep’s programs for education provided live theatre for more than 20,000 students annually. In 1995, she became general manager, and since then has overseen the day-to-day operations of the Theatre. She has represented the League of Resident Theatres during negotiations with both Actors’ Equity Association and the union of stage directors and choreographers. Prior to her tenure at Berkeley Rep, Karen worked for Theatre Bay Area as director of theatre services and as an independent producer at several Bay Area theatre companies. She has served on the boards of Climate Theater, Overtone Company, Park Day School, and the Julia Morgan Center. Karen is married to arts attorney MJ Bogatin.

**Liesl Tommy**
**ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR**

Liesl is Berkeley Rep’s associate director and helmed the acclaimed productions of *Party People* and *Ruined*. She directed the premieres of *Appropriate* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Sigh moth Theatre Company), *Party People* by *UNIVERSES* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *The White Man — A Complex Declaration of Love* by Joan Rang (Dans/Dans Theatre, Denmark), *Peggy Picket Sees the Face of God* by Roland Schimmelpfenig (Luminato Festival/Canadian Stage Toronto), *Eclipsed* by Danai Gurira (Yale Repertory Theatre, Woolly Mammoth), *The Good Negro* by Tracey Scott Wilson (the Public Theater, Dallas Theater Center), *A History of Light* by Eisa Davis (Contemporary American Theatre Festival), *Angela’s Mixtape* by Eisa Davis (*Synchronicity Performance Group, New Georges*), and *Bus and Family Ties* (*Play Company for the Romania Kiss Me! Festival*). Other credits include *American Buffalo, Les Misérables, Hamlet, A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Mo Rainey’s Black Bottom*, as well as a four-city tour of *Ruined*. She has also worked at California Shakespeare Theater, the Huntington Theatre Company, Center Stage in Baltimore, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, La Jolla Playhouse, and Sundance East Africa on Manda Island in Kenya, among others. Liesl serves as a program associate at Sundance Institute Theatre Program and as an artist trustee with the Sundance Institute’s board of trustees, and she facilitated the inaugural Sundance East Africa Theatre Director’s Lab in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Liesl has earned an Obie Award, a Lillian Hellman Award, and the Alan Schneider Award for directing, the inaugural Susan Stoneman Directing Award from the Vineyard Theatre, the NEA/TCG Directors Grant, and the New York Theatre Workshop Casting/Directing Fellowship. She has taught or guest directed at Yale Repertory Theatre, Juilliard, NYU, and Brown University. Liesl is an alum of Trinity Rep Conservatory and a native of Cape Town, South Africa.

**Madeleine Oldham**
**RESPOND DRAAMATURG/DIRECTOR, THE GROUND FLOOR**

Madeleine is the director of the Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep’s Center for the Creation and Development of New Work and the Theatre’s resident dramaturg. She oversees commissioning and new play development, and dramatized the world premiere productions of *The House that will not Stand, Passing Strange*, and *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)*, among others. As literary manager and associate dramaturg at Center Stage in Baltimore, 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 Intiman Theatre in Seattle. Madeleine served for four years on the executive committee of Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas and has also worked with ACT (Seattle), Austin Scriptworks, Crowded Fire, the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center, the Kennedy Center, New Dramatists, Playwrights Center, and Portland Center Stage.

**Michael Suenkel**
**PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER**

Michael began his association with Berkeley Rep as the stage management intern for the 1984–85 season and is now in his 21st year as production stage manager. Some of his favorite shows include *36 Views, Endgame, Euridice, Hydrataphia*, and *Mad Forest*. He has also worked with the Barbican in London, the Huntington Theatre Company, the Juste Pour Rire Festival in Montreal, La Jolla Playhouse, Pittsburgh Public Theater, the Public Theater and Second Stage Theater in New York, and Yale Repertory Theatre. For the Magic Theatre, he stage managed Albert Taakauckas’ *Breaking the Code* and Sam Shepard’s *The Late Henry Moss*.

**Jack & Betty Schafer**
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Betty and Jack are proud to support Berkeley Rep. Jack, one of the Theatre’s trustees, also sits on the boards of San Francisco Opera and the Straus Historical Society. He is vice-chair of the Oxbow School in Napa and an emeritus trustee of the San Francisco Art Institute, where he served as board chair. Betty, a retired life coach, has resumed her earlier career as a nonfiction writer and poet. She serves on the boards of Brandeis Hillel Day School, Coro Foundation, Earthjustice, and Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (seo).

**The Strauch Kulhanjian Family**
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Roger Strauch is a former president of Berkeley Rep’s board of trustees and is currently chair of the trustees committee. He is chairman of the Roda Group (rodagroup.com), a venture-development company based in Berkeley focused on cleantech investments, best known for launching Ask.com and for being the largest investor in Solazyme, a renewable oil and bio-products company (Nasdaq: szym, solazyme.com). Roger is chairman of the board of CoolSystems, a medical technology company, and a member of the UC

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Berkeley Engineering Dean’s college advisory board. He is chairman of the board of trustees for the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute; a member of the board of Northside Center, a mental-health services agency based in Harlem, New York City; and a co-founder of the William Saroyan Program in Armenian Studies at Cal. His wife, Julie A. Kulhanjian, is an attending physician at Oakland Children’s Hospital. They have three children.

**Kerry Francis & John Jimerson**
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Kerry and John are excited to support Head of Passes. John is the learning and development manager at Chevron’s Richmond refinery and has enjoyed the thought-provoking plays produced by Berkeley Rep. Kerry is a member of Berkeley Rep’s board of trustees, a partner at Deloitte FAS LLP, and a graduate of UC Berkeley.

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The Hoag Theatre Store is better than ever, featuring our new hoodie with earbuds and exclusive items from our staff artisans. Wonderful gifts for you and the theatre-lovers in your life!
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Both theatres offer wheelchair seating and special services for those with vision or hearing loss. Assistive listening devices are available at no charge in both theatre lobbies. Scripts are available in the box office. Open captioning is available for at least one performance of every season production.

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No food or glassware in the house
Beverages in cans or cups with lids are allowed.

No smoking
The use of e-cigarettes is prohibited in Berkeley Rep's buildings and courtyard.

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

Phones / electronics / recordings
Please make sure your cell phone or watch alarm will not beep. 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, but please don't step onto the stage.

No children under 7
Many Berkeley Rep productions are unsuitable for young children. Please inquire before bringing children to the Theatre.
No babes in arms.

Theatre store
Berkeley Rep merchandise and show-related books are available in the Hoag Theatre Store in the Roda Theatre.

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
Bring Berkeley Rep to your school! Call the School of Theatre at 510 647-2972 about free and low-cost workshops for elementary, middle, and high schools. Call Sarah Nowicki at 510 647-2918 for $10 student-matinee tickets. Call the box office at 510 647-2949 about discounted subscriptions for preschool and K–12 educators.

Request information
To request mailings or change your address, write to Berkeley Rep, 2025 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA 94704; call 510 647-2949; email info@berkeleyrep.org; or click berkeleyrep.org/joinourlist. If you use Gmail, Yahoo, or other online email accounts, please authorize patronreply@berkeleyrep.org.
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Steven Sapp and the cast of Party People
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