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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GET IN ON “THE GROUND FLOOR” AT BERKELEY REP

Tony Award-winning theatre launches Center for the Creation and Development of New Work

SEPTEMBER 15, 2011 – Today, Berkeley Repertory Theatre announced a bold new initiative designed to raise the bar on its already successful record of artistic innovation. The Tony Award-winning nonprofit is launching The Ground Floor: Berkeley Rep’s Center for the Creation and Development of New Work. An extraordinary laboratory for collaboration, this new program seeks to enhance and expand the process by which Berkeley Rep makes theatre. Think of it as an incubator for theatrical start-ups or a top-notch R&D facility for artists. The Ground Floor will promote cross-pollination among artists and champion the spirit of innovation inherent to Berkeley and the Bay Area. Get in on The Ground Floor!

“In recent years, we’ve been increasingly drawn to work that stretches the traditional literary form,” says **Tony Taccone**, artistic director of Berkeley Rep. “As we’ve explored new ways to develop plays and expanded our use of other artistic mediums, we’ve discovered that our familiar rehearsal and performance model is well-suited to work that is rooted in language and narrative – but it’s not as effective for work that draws on other media, such as music and dance, or which evolves through collaborative creation. So we’re launching The Ground Floor to encompass all of our efforts to create new work, including commissions, workshops, and an exciting new summer residency lab.”

The Ground Floor became possible when Berkeley Rep united all its preproduction activities – its costume shop, prop shop, scene shop, and administrative offices – at a new campus in West Berkeley. Now the Theatre is transforming a vacant warehouse on that site into a vibrant new creative center that will ultimately include rehearsal halls, intimate studios, and perhaps even housing for visiting artists. The result will be a dynamic home for play creation – an organic and energetic environment for artists where they can live, develop work in a flexible setting, challenge each other to expand the boundaries of theatre, and intersect with the public to create community.

The leaders of this new program are **Madeleine Oldham**, Berkeley Rep’s resident dramaturg and director of The Ground Floor, and **Meghan Pressman**, Berkeley Rep’s associate managing director and managing director of The Ground Floor. **Mina Morita** is also joining the staff as a new artistic associate. Seed money for these activities is provided by a \$1 million grant from the **James Irvine Foundation’s Artistic Innovation Fund** and a \$750,000 grant from **ArtPlace**.

This isn’t the first time Berkeley Rep has moved into a new neighborhood with an ambitious plan. The nonprofit was born in a storefront on College Avenue, but as its audience grew it built a new home on Addison Street. **Tom Bates**, the mayor of Berkeley, recalls the Theatre’s impact on the city’s downtown: “Their enthusiastic and collaborative spirit helped the City attract other arts organizations to the downtown. The result has been an astoundingly successful revitalization project and one of the best examples in our community of private businesses working cooperatively with the City to further our shared civic goals.”

“Just as Berkeley Rep made an impact downtown, we hope that our move to Harrison Street will initiate positive changes as well,” remarks **Susan Medak**, managing director of Berkeley Rep.

(MORE)

RECIPIENT OF THE TONY AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING REGIONAL THEATRE

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"We know from experience that a dramatic investment like this will deeply change our organization. We're aiming to attract exciting artists to our center for innovation – but we're also hoping that all this creative activity will increase neighborhood vitality as well. Working together with the city, cultural organizations, entrepreneurs, and local residents, we can create a more livable community."

Berkeley Rep is the recipient of a four-year \$1 million grant from the James Irvine Foundation to support The Ground Floor and its first annual summer session. Berkeley Rep also received a \$750,000 grant from ArtPlace to support its efforts to build a center that will benefit artists and the surrounding community. ArtPlace is an initiative of 11 of America's top foundations working in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts and seven federal agencies. Its aim is to drive revitalization across the country by putting the arts at the center of economic development. ArtPlace has now announced its first round of grants, investing \$11.5 million in 34 locally initiated projects in cities from Honolulu to Miami. Each project supported by ArtPlace has been selected for developing a new model of helping towns and cities thrive by strategically integrating artists and arts organizations into key local efforts in transportation, housing, community development, job creation, and more.

Artists who would like to participate in The Ground Floor's first summer residency lab in July 2012 should submit applications by November 1, 2011. For more information, visit berkeleyrep.org/groundfloor.

ABOUT BERKELEY REP

Berkeley Repertory Theatre has grown from a storefront stage to a national leader in innovative theatre. Known for its core values of imagination and excellence, as well as its educated and adventurous audience, the nonprofit has provided a welcoming home for emerging and established artists since 1968. With two stages, a school, and a Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, Berkeley Rep is proud to premiere exhilarating new plays. In the last six years, the company has helped send six shows to Broadway. Seven more landed off Broadway, one moved to London, two turned into films, and others have toured the nation. Come see tomorrow's plays today at Berkeley Rep.

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