



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Media contact: Kimberly Dooley, Producing Artistic Director
kimberly@berkeleyplayhouse.org | Office: (510) 845-8542

**BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES
10th ANNIVERSARY SEASON!**

**2017-18 SEASON TO FEATURE PREMIERES',
PAST HIT PRODUCTIONS,
AND A NEW "FIRST-LOOK" CONCERT EVENT**

**Focus on community involvement to include expansion of
"Pay What You Can" performances**

BERKELEY (March 27, 2017) – Berkeley Playhouse Founding Artistic Director Elizabeth McKoy and Producing Artistic Director Kimberly Dooley announced today that the 10th anniversary season of the award-winning theater company for all ages includes an East Bay premiere, its first staging of an acclaimed American musical, and a return of one of the biggest hits in the company's 10-year history. Kicking off the season will be the heavenly musical comedy ***Sister Act*** from eight-time Oscar winner Alan Menken (*Little Shop of Horrors*, Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Little Mermaid*). The holiday season will see the return of one of Berkeley Playhouse's biggest hits, ***Annie***. The new year will welcome the Berkeley Playhouse premiere of ***Ragtime***, Lynn Ahrens' and Stephen Flaherty's Tony Award-winning musical about a changing America at the turn the 20th century. In the spring, Berkeley Playhouse presents the East Bay premiere of ***Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach***, a new, expanded adaptation of the literary classic from the Oscar-winning composers of *La La Land* and the current Broadway smash *Dear Evan Hansen*, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul. Closing out the season will be with the ultimate "summer nights" musical, ***Grease***. Current Berkeley Playhouse Season Pass holders will receive priority information on renewing their season passes and new season passes are available beginning today by visiting www.berkeleyplayhouse.org.

The season will also include an exciting special event—a "first look" concert of a new musical being developed by Berkeley Playhouse, which will be presented in a full staging during their 2018-19 season. Details on the concert, including the announcement of the source material and creative team will be announced at a future date.

"As we enter into our tenth season of producing professional musicals and I reflect on our journey thus far, I feel a deep sense of pride for our accomplishments" says Founding Artistic Director Elizabeth McKoy. "Our intentional multi-cultural casting has brought our beautifully diverse community to our stage to tell incredible stories. We've seen kids truly grow up on our stage and in our classes, building lasting and meaningful relationships and skills here. We've nurtured over six original musicals for all ages, including a world premiere, and we continue to support a thriving local team of artists, educators and administrators that make our theater hum with creativity and life. It's inspiring that what began with a small kid's show in my living room is now a thriving organization at the historic Julia Morgan theater, serving over 2,000 children a year in our conservatory, and seeing over 35,000 audience members walk through the door. We look forward to the next decade being one of even more growth, inclusion and engagement."

Adds Producing Artistic Director Kimberly Dooley, "It's really a complex group process to pick our season. We consider a broad range of factors—from productions that engage and delight audiences across the age spectrum to shows that reflect the makeup of our community. Providing an inter-generational experience here is core to who we are and what we do—there is nothing more thrilling than seeing three generations of audiences seated in the Julia Morgan experiences a musical together.. We also deeply value the idea of community and find that many patrons, students and actors find a deep sense of belonging here at the theater, partly, I hope, because we choose productions that speak directly to our audiences and our staff . Every show this season has a QUEST FOR COMMUNITY at its core. Characters throughout are searching for "their place" or a place to fit in. From a convent in the 1990's to a dingy 1930's orphanage...from turn of the century New York City to a fantastical, giant *PEACH*... to a hand-jiving 1950's high school, this season will have you falling in love with incredible characters as they journey on their adventures to find community."

The company will also expand it's popular "**Pay What You Can**" program from one to two performances for each production. At these special performances, audiences may arrive at the theater one-hour prior to performance time and pay whatever they can afford to attend that evening's performance. The expansion of this program was made possible through funding efforts of Berkeley Playhouse's *Spotlight* programs, and contributions by season pass holders and attendees at the inaugural "Shine" fundraising event held this past week. "We surpassed our goal of raising \$10,000 at our first *Shine* event held in conjunction with a special performance of *Billy Elliot, The Musical*, and we couldn't be more thrilled at how our Spotlight donors and season pass holders helped us to meet—and surpass—our goals of making theater accessible to our entire community," say Managing Director Gretchen Feyer. "*Billy Elliot* shattered all attendance records at Berkeley Playhouse, and we are planning exciting events for our tenth anniversary season!"

The 2017-18 season begins in September with the East Bay premiere of ***Sister Act***. From the composer of *Little Shop of Horrors* and Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* comes this toe-tapping, gospel-infused, feel-good musical based on one of the biggest film comedies of the 90s. When downtown disco diva Dolores Van Cartier witnesses a crime, she's placed into protective custody in the one place she's sure not to be found – a convent! Forced to trade in her nighttime habit of

nightclubbing and disco dancing for a nuns habit, Dolores finds newfound self-worth, confidence, and a community she never expected to be a part of, as she leads the church choir of sisters to heavenly new heights, transforming the church into a revitalized home of celebration, song, and community spirit. Filled with powerful music, outrageous choreography, and a moving story of unlikely friendships, *Sister Act* will raise the roof of the Julia Morgan Theater!

The holiday season will see be a present for audiences young and old alike as one of the most popular musicals of all time returns to Berkeley Playhouse, ***Annie***. In 1930s depression era New York, young orphaned Annie is determined to find the parents that left her on the doorstep of the New York City Orphanage, run by the soused and sour Miss Hannigan. When Annie is chosen by billionaire Oliver Warbucks to spend the holidays at his mansion, she leaves behind the only community she's ever known, and her daily life of "hard knocks" and "maybe's" turns into one of cinemas and Roll's Royce's. . . and an opportunity to discover the truth about her parents. Filled with adventure, mayhem, and the discovery of what family truly means, *Annie* is a true Broadway classic.

In February 2018, one of the most acclaimed American musicals of the last twenty years will make its premiere at the Julia Morgan—***Ragtime***, the sweeping epic of hopes and dreams in a changing America at the turn of the 20th century. Just beyond the gaze of lady liberty, the stories of three evolving and distinct communities in New York are woven together to create a fabric that blankets a new era in the land of opportunity. A Jewish immigrant seeking a new life in America is awakened to the possibilities of success; a mother from an upper-class suburban family sees that privilege and comfort may not be as desirable as she once thought; and a gifted African-American musician, prolific in the dissonant and romantic melodies of ragtime, learns that love and passion can spark the wheels of change. Peppered with great historical characters from Houdini to Henry Ford to Booker T. Washington, *Ragtime's* Tony Award-winning score draws upon the unique sounds of the American soundscape—heard from Harlem to the Lower-East-Side—to create a truly remarkable theatrical event.

From the Oscar-winning team that brought you the music of *La La Land* and the hit Broadway musicals *Dear Evan Hansen* and *A Christmas Story* comes an all new adventured filled family classic, ***Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach***—based on the beloved story from the author of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Sent to chop down an old fruit tree by his devious aunts, young James discovers a magic potion that turns an ordinary peach into a massive, oversized GIANT! Finding himself at the center of this king-sized peach and surrounded by life size insects (with larger than life personalities), the peach falls from the tree, rolling into the nearby ocean—and these new cohabitants from very different communities must face even bigger problems—hunger, dangerous foes, and learning how to communicate when facing challenging decisions. A journey of epic proportions, *James and the Giant Peach* is the lyrical, hummable, and fantastical musical for families of all ages.

The season closes with the ultimate summer musical—***Grease!*** It's 1959, and the kids from Rydell High are back from summer vacation for their senior year—and what a memorable one it will be! Good girl Sandy and leader of the pack

Danny had a brief fling during their “summer nights”—but when Sandy shows up at Rydell as a new student, romance gets replaced with reputation, and musical theater’s most beloved couple must navigate sock-hops, slumber-parties, and social rivalries before finding their true selves, and the long-lasting community one finds in high-school that realizes “we go together”—forever! One of the most popular musicals of all time, Berkeley Playhouse audiences will be hand-jiving all summer long as the Pink Ladies and Thunderbirds take to the Julia Morgan stage for this rock-n-rolling 50s celebration of teen spirit.

ABOUT BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE: Founded in 2007 by professional theatre actor, director, and teacher for over 25 years, Elizabeth McKoy, Berkeley Playhouse’s mission is to create theatre and programs that engage, ignite, and celebrate diverse Bay Area audiences through a thriving conservatory, a professional main stage season, educational outreach, and a commitment to the development of new family musicals. In support of our mission, we maintain and enhance the historic Julia Morgan Theater. A commitment to community, diversity, inclusion, and empowerment is at the heart of our work.

#

BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE 2017-18 SEASON AT A GLANCE

Sister Act

Music by Alan Menken

Lyrics by Glenn Slater

Book by Cheri Steinkellner and Bill Steinkellner

Additional book material by Douglas Carter Bean

Based on the Touchstone Pictures Motion Picture, *Sister Act*, written by Joseph Howard.

September 22 – October 22, 2017

Press Night: September 23, 2017

“Ridiculously fun! The only thing better than big, glitzy numbers? Big glitzy numbers. . . with nuns! *Sister Act* is off the charts and packed with goodies!”

New York Post

“Thrilling!”

The New Yorker

From the composer of *Little Shop of Horrors* and Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* comes this toe-tapping, gospel-infused, feel-good musical based on one of the biggest film comedies of the 90s. When downtown disco diva Dolores Van Cartier witnesses a crime, she’s placed into protective custody in the one place she’s sure not to be found – a convent! Forced to trade in her nighttime habit of nightclubbing and disco dancing for a nun’s habit, Dolores finds newfound self-worth, confidence, and a community she never expected to be a part of, as she leads the church choir of sisters to heavenly new heights, transforming the church into a revitalized home of celebration, song, and community spirit. Filled with powerful music, outrageous choreography, and a moving story of unlikely friendships, *Sister Act* will raise the roof of the Julia Morgan—can we hear an AMEN!

Annie

Book by Thomas Meehan

Music by Charles Strouse

Lyrics by Martin Charnin

Based on *Little Orphan Annie* by permission of The Media Tribune Services, Inc.

November 10 – December 23, 2017

Press Night: November 11, 2017

“An unstoppable sunshine steamroller!”

The New York Times

“A beloved pop-cultural icon... this is a tough show to resist!”

The Hollywood Reporter

Leapin’ lizards! One of the most popular musicals of all time returns to Berkeley Playhouse in an all new production that’s going to “*shine* like the top of the Chrysler building!” In 1930s depression era New York, young orphaned Annie is determined to find the parents that left her on the doorstep of the New York City Orphanage, run by the soused and sour Miss Hannigan. When Annie is chosen by billionaire Oliver Warbucks to spend the holidays at his mansion, she leaves behind the only community she’s ever known, and her daily life of “hard knocks” and “maybe’s” turns into one of cinemas and Roll’s Royce’s. . . and an opportunity to discover the truth about her parents. Filled with adventure, mayhem, and the discovery of what family truly means, *Annie* is a true Broadway classic.

Ragtime

Book by Terrence McNally

Lyrics by Lynn Ahrens

Music by Stephen Flaherty

Based on the novel *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow

February 16 – March 18, 2018

Press Night: February 17, 2018

“A triumph for the stage!” *TIME Magazine*

“*Ragtime* seems to speak directly to our present moment.”

The Telegraph, London

One of the most acclaimed American musicals of the last twenty years, *Ragtime* is a sweeping epic of hopes and dreams in a changing America at the turn of the 20th century. Just beyond the gaze of lady liberty, the stories of three evolving and distinct communities in New York are woven together to create a fabric that blankets a new era in the land of opportunity. A Jewish immigrant seeking a new life in America is awakened to the possibilities of success; a mother from an upper-class suburban family sees that privilege and comfort may not be as desirable as she once thought; and a gifted African-American musician, prolific in the dissonant and romantic melodies of ragtime, learns that love and passion can spark the wheels of change. Peppered with great historical characters from Houdini to Henry Ford to Booker T. Washington, *Ragtime*’s Tony Award-winning score draws upon the unique sounds of the American soundscape—heard from Harlem to the Lower-East-Side—to create a truly remarkable theatrical event.

Roald Dahl’s James and Giant Peach

Book by Timothy Allen McDonald

Music & Lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

Based on the book “James and Giant Peach” by Roald Dahl

April 6 – May 6, 2018
Press Night: April 7, 2018

“Magical sweetness. . . something than can make the musical theater lover squeal with delight! A wonderfully touching show. . . filled with heart.”
BroadwayWorld.com

“Captivating! A little sweet, a little sour, a little edgy. . . a blithe, catchy score”
The Seattle Times

From the Oscar-winning team that brought you the music of *La La Land* and the hit Broadway musicals *Dear Evan Hansen* and *A Christmas Story* comes an all new adventured filled family classic based on the beloved story by Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*). Sent to chop down an old fruit tree by his devious aunts, young James discovers a magic potion that turns an ordinary peach into a massive, oversized GIANT! Finding himself at the center of this king-sized peach and surrounded by life size insects (with larger than life personalities), the peach falls from the tree, rolling into the nearby ocean—and these new cohabitants from *very* different communities must face even bigger problems—hunger, dangerous foes, and learning how to communicate when facing challenging decisions. A journey of epic proportions, *James and the Giant Peach* is the lyrical, hummable, and fantastical musical for families of all ages.

Grease
Book, Music & Lyrics
by Jim Jacobs & Warren Casey

June 22 – Aug 5, 2018
Press Night: June 23, 2018

It’s 1959, and the kids from Rydell High are back from summer vacation for their senior year—and what a memorable one it will be! Good girl Sandy and leader of the pack Danny had a brief fling during their “summer nights”—but when Sandy shows up at Rydell as a new student, romance gets replaced with reputation, and musical theater’s most beloved couple must navigate sock-hops, slumber-parties, and social rivalries before finding their true selves, and that unique community one finds in high-school that realizes “we go together!” One of the most popular musicals of all time, Berkeley Playhouse audiences will be hand-jiving all summer long as the Pink Ladies and Thunderbirds take to the Julia Morgan stage for this rock-n-rolling 50s celebration of teen spirit.

#