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**BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF *BRIDGES: A NEW MUSICAL* BY AWARD WINNING WRITING TEAM OF CHERYL L. DAVIS AND DOUGLAS J. COHEN**

**Berkeley, CA** (December 23, 2015) – **Berkeley Playhouse** is proud to present the world premiere of *Bridges: A New Musical*, with lyrics and book by **Cheryl L. Davis** (2009 Writers' Guild Award winner and Daytime Emmy Award nominee for *As the World Turns*), composed by **Douglas J. Cohen** (2005 Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Lyrics for Off-Broadway's *Children's Letters to God*, Richard Rodgers Grants and the Gilman & Conzalez-Falla Theatre Foundation Award for Off-Broadway's *No Way to Treat a Lady*), and conceived by Founding Artistic Director **Elizabeth McKoy** (developer of new musical theatre works for Berkeley Playhouse including: *Born And Raised*, *Bravado*, and *Just So Stories*). Previews begin February 11, 2016 and the show runs from February 13 to March 6, 2016 at the historic Julia Morgan Theater, 2640 College Avenue in Berkeley. Tickets are now available through the Box Office by phone **(510) 845-8542 x351** or online **[www.berkeleyplayhouse.org](http://www.berkeleyplayhouse.org)**.

*Bridges: A New Musical* centers on the story of a multiracial family in the Bay Area celebrating their triumphs and joys, but also struggling with their growing pains. Its' matriarch recalls growing up in Selma, Alabama, at the height of the civil rights movement, and reveals a secret that could change the family forever. The story takes place both in Selma, circa 1965, and Berkeley, circa 2008. The contemporary family is still dealing with issues of race and identity long after Grandma Francine marched to Birmingham from Selma in 1965, when as a young woman she boldly joined a movement to fight for her civil rights. Decades later, another young woman faces her own battle for equality. As their stories collide across time and distance, each must come to terms with who she is in the context of a changing and complicated world. Full of soulful melodies, *Bridges: A New Musical* is an empowering story that explores our country's past and present – how far we've come, how far we have to go, and the bridges we must cross to get there.

Remarking on the birth of her original concept, Founding Artistic Director Elizabeth McKoy says, "Seven years ago my daughter, who was 11 at the time, and I watched a movie called *Selma Lord Selma*, which made a very powerful impact on her. She was overcome with a range of emotions after learning about the deaths and victory of the Marches at Selma, and it triggered a lot of questions for her. She didn't realize that the fight for Civil Rights involved so many violent and painful steps, that blacks and whites together

fought, marched, and risked their lives and that children were a part of the movement. She was so curious and ultimately inspired by the story that I knew this was the seed of an important theatre journey.”

McKoy commissioned the writing team of Cheryl L. Davis and Douglas J. Cohen in 2012 to bring the concept to page. Davis says of the commission by McKoy, “After discussions about how to make that story relate to her California community, the decision was made to connect 1965 Selma with 2008 Oakland, and to tell both stories through one family. There’s been a lot of back and forth with the theater that has forced me to focus on the intricacies of the book, which is especially needed in telling a tale that goes back and forth in time. Each draft has enabled me to deepen the characters and their relationships.” Cohen adds, “This is an incredibly moving time in history which reverberates today as we sadly witness African American’s fighting for their lives. At the same time, it’s also historical to see such incredible strides with Marriage Equality. So I guess our political landscape has been something of an inspiration while writing this piece. It’s a complex, multi-faceted story containing characters with whom I can sympathize/empathize.”

Commenting on the musical’s relevance to current events McKoy elaborates, “Setting the show in both 1965 and 2008 was a genius invention that allowed us to talk about the recent past and draw parallels between the recent discrimination against LGBTs and the Marriage Equality movement with the 1960s Civil Rights movement, contextualized with a family spanning three generations. I knew it was perfect for a musical because of the power that music had in the Civil Rights movement. I started the Playhouse with the goal of telling musical stories that would make audiences think and feel and connect to others and the world. New works are essential for a theatre company like ours because music is the perfect language to bridge generations in storytelling. *Bridges: A New Musical* encompasses so many themes that are central to defining who we are and why we choose to live in the Bay Area.”

## **HISTORY OF *BRIDGES: A NEW MUSICAL***

Late in 2011 Berkeley Playhouse Founding Artistic Director Elizabeth McKoy was inspired by recent and past events to develop a new musical. Berkeley Playhouse commissioned lyricist and book writer Cheryl L. Davis and composer Douglas J. Cohen to develop the piece. The first staged reading was held on the Berkeley Playhouse stage in May 2013. From there, Davis, Cohen, and McKoy along with Berkeley Playhouse’s Producing Artistic Director Daren A.C. Carollo continued the diligent process of developing and reworking of the script and music. In December 2014, Berkeley Playhouse presented another reading of the updated draft directed by Carollo. This year, Berkeley Playhouse is ecstatic to bring this long process to a new level and present the world premiere of *Bridges: A New Musical* as part of our 2015/16 Professional Season. This production will be fully staged, in costume, with a live band.

## **CREATORS OF *BRIDGES: A NEW MUSICAL***

DOUGLAS J. COHEN (Composer) received the 2010 Fred Ebb Award for Musical Theatre Songwriting and won two Richard Rodgers Awards for writing book, music, and lyrics for *No Way To Treat A Lady* (produced twice off-Broadway including The York Theatre Co., resulting in productions worldwide) and *The Gig* (the most honored musical in the 2014 off-Broadway NYMF Festival, workshops/showcases at O'Neill National Music Theater Conference, MTC, Goodspeed and Sacramento Music Circus. Winner of York Theatre Company's inaugural Noël Coward Prize). He is writing the book/lyrics to *Valentino's Tango*, which Tony nominee Chet Walker is developing with commercial producers, and contributed original songs to off-Broadway's *Boozy* directed by Alex Timbers. His latest completed musical, *Nine Waves* with collaborator Dan Elish, recently received a developmental production at the TriArts-Sharon Playhouse and a staged reading at Goodspeed's Festival of New Artists. Doug penned music and lyrics for *The Opposite of Sex* (Williamstown Theatre Festival, Magic Theatre) and *The Big Time* (book by Douglas Carter Beane) which debuted at the NYMF Festival. Nominated for a 2005 Drama Desk Award (Outstanding Lyrics, *Children's Letters To God*, Lamb's Theatre), he received a Jonathan Larson Grant for *Barnstormer* (co-written with Cheryl L. Davis, selected for the NAMT Festival). His new play, *Lovely Send Anywhere* (Laurents-Hatcher Award Finalist) has been developed at the Lark Play Development Center and off-Broadway's The Cell Theatre. Doug and Zoe Samuel are collaborating on *Helen of Troy*, a new musical which benefited from a New York Stage & Film residency through the Lark Theatre and a recent NYC reading. He currently teaches Song Interpretation at the Neighborhood Playhouse and is a member of ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild.

CHERYL L. DAVIS (Lyricist and Librettist) is a musical theater librettist and lyricist, and is an alumna of the Advanced Workshop of the BMI/Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop. She worked on the musical *Barnstormer* with composer Douglas J. Cohen (*No Way to Treat a Lady*, *The ig*, *Glimmerglass*). She is also working on *Sugar Dumpling* with composer C. Colby Sachs; this piece is set during the American Civil War, and is loosely adapted from the short story *Boule de Suif* by Guy de Maupassant. She has a degree in English and a Certificate in Theatre and Dance from Princeton University, and has studied playwriting with Jean-Claude Van Itallie and Jeffrey Sweet. She was a Dramatists Guild Fellow in 2002, and was mentored by playwright/librettist Alfred Uhry. She is an alumna of the Playwrights' Lab of the Women's Project and Productions, of the River Writers Unit of the Ensemble Studio Theatre, and is a member of the Dramatists Guild and an associate artist of the Milk Can Theatre Company. She is the Vice President of Theater Resources Unlimited, a producers' networking organization, and is a member of the Board of the League of Professional Theater Women. She is the recipient of a 2009 Writers' Guild Award for her work as a writer for the daytime dramatic serial *As the World Turns*, and has been

nominated for a Daytime Emmy Award for her work on that show as well. She is a practicing attorney in Manhattan and is a partner with the firm of Menaker & Herrmann LLP.

ELIZABETH MCKOY (Founding Artistic Director) Elizabeth founded and has led the Berkeley Playhouse since its inception; directing *Peter Pan* in 2009, *Cinderella: Enchanted*, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Sound of Music*, and *A Little Princess*. Favorite Conservatory Imagination Players shows include: *Mulan Jr*, *Once On This Island*, *Into The Woods*, *Starmites*, *Zombie Prom*, and *13 The Musical*. She has also commissioned and developed new musical theatre works for the Berkeley Playhouse including: *Born And Raised*, *Bravado*, *Just So Stories*, and *Bridges: A New Musical*. She helped start the Bay Area affiliate of New York's Lincoln Center Institute for Arts Education in the Schools. As Education Director, she brought arts education to thousands of school children and teachers in the Bay Area. Now, in addition to producing, directing, and teaching for Berkeley Playhouse, she is currently working to develop and sustain the Playhouse's unique vision for musical theatre and theatre education.

#### **PERFORMANCES AND TICKETS FOR *BRIDGES: A NEW MUSICAL***

**Previews:** Thursday, February 11, 2016 at 7pm, and Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 1pm

**Opens:** Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 6pm

**Press:** Saturday, February 13, 2016 at 6pm

**Closes:** Sunday, March 6, 2016 at 12pm

**Performances:** Due to the unique performance schedule, please check the website for specific dates and times. All performances take place at Berkeley Playhouse at The Julia Morgan Theater, 2640 College Ave. Berkeley, CA 94704.

**TICKETS:** On sale now. For tickets (\$17 for previews, \$23 – \$60 for regular performances) or more information, please call (510) 845-8542 x351 or visit [www.berkeleyplayhouse.org](http://www.berkeleyplayhouse.org). Group rates are available for 10 or more people.

Special Thursday Evening "Pay-What-You-Will" performance on March 3 at 7pm. Cash only at the door, with a \$5 – \$20 sliding scale.

**ABOUT BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE:** Berkeley Playhouse was founded in 2007 by professional theatre actor, director, and teacher for over 25 years, **Elizabeth McKoy**. With the rapid growth of the company, the Board of Directors brought on Producing Artistic Director **Daren A.C. Carollo** and Director of Education **Rachel Eisner** to collaborate with McKoy to continue Berkeley Playhouse's development into a professional musical theatre providing our community with a unique and sophisticated experience. Additionally, Berkeley Playhouse offers a range of skill and performance based theatre training for young actors through our thriving School of Musical Theatre. In 2009, Berkeley Playhouse made the historic Julia Morgan Theater its permanent home.

For press photos please visit: <http://berkeleyplayhouse.org/about/press-room/press-photos/>

To request additional information or photos, or to arrange interviews with those involved, please contact Jase Smith, Marketing and Public Relations Manager, at (510) 845-8542 x 381 or [jase@berkeleyplayhouse.org](mailto:jase@berkeleyplayhouse.org).

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