



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE MAINSTAGE PRESENTS

***THE 25th ANNUAL
PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE***
April 5–May 4, 2014

Book by **Rachel Sheinkin** • Music and Lyrics by **William Finn**

Berkeley, CA (March 4, 2014) – **Berkeley Playhouse** continues its sixth season with the Tony Award-winning, contemporary musical comedy **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE**. Directed by **Kimberley Dooley** and running from **April 5 to May 4, 2014** at the Julia Morgan Theater, 2640 College Ave. in Berkeley. Tickets (\$17–\$60) are now on-sale at www.berkeleyplayhouse.org or by phone at **(510) 845-8542 x351**.

After receiving favorable reviews and three Drama Desk Awards, **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE** opened on Broadway in 2005 and received the Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical (Rachel Sheinkin) along with several nominations including Best Original Score and Best Musical.

For six young people, the spelling bee is the pinnacle of their middle school career. Quirky, awkward, and in the midst of puberty; there is a lot more going on at the spelling bee than constantans and vowels, especially with equally quirky parents and teachers as organizers of the bee. Complete with honest and heartfelt songs such as “My Friend, The Dictionary,” “Woe is Me,” and “I’m Not That Smart” these young outsiders learn that winning isn’t everything and that losing doesn’t make you a loser.

Special to the production of **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE** is the incorporation of improvisation and audience participation. Four audience members are selected to join the cast on stage as additional contestants in the bee at each performance. Some ‘use it in a sentence’ examples are improvised, making each show of this hilarious musical a unique experience.

Berkeley Playhouse will also use the alternate lyric for “Chips Lament”, replacing “My Unfortunate Erection” with “My Unfortunate Distraction.” This will mark one of the few times a professional company has made this switch, allowing families to come enjoy the show together.

“Though it’s been a long time since elementary and middle school for many of us ... *Spelling Bee’s* message is relevant and important for everyone: being unique and different is what



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makes us special and once we fully embrace who we are, there is nothing we can't do. This is an important lesson, maybe the most important lesson, for young people to learn and for adults to revisit. I didn't want the language in one song to make our younger audiences feel awkward sitting next to their parents and distracting them from that message," said Berkeley Playhouse Artistic Director Elizabeth McKoy.

THE CAST:

The cast features: **Chloe Condon** as Logainne Schwartzandgrubenniery (*Snoopy!* with 42nd Street Moon, *Hairspray* with Broadway By the Bay); **Michelle Drexler** as Rona Lisa Perretti (*Camelot* with SF Playhouse, *Julius Caesar* with San Francisco Shakespeare Festival on Tour); **Catherine Gloria** as Marcy Park (*The Magic School Bus* national tour, *It's a Bird...It's a Plane...It's Superman!* at 42nd Street Moon); **Edward Hightower** as Douglas Panch (*Assassins* with Custom Made Theatre Company, *Cabaret* with Napa Valley Broadway Playhouse); **Orianna Hillard** as Olive Ostrovsky (*She Kills Monsters* with Renegade Theatre, *A Chorus Line* with Woodminster Summer Musicals); **Neal Pascua** as Chip Tolentino (*The Wiz* with Berkeley Playhouse, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*); **Branden Thomas** as Mitch Mahone (*Les Misérables*, *Hairspray*); **Max Thorne** as Leaf Coneybear (*Rent* with Altarena Playhouse, *Beauty and the Beast* with Pacific Coast Repertory Theatre); and **Nick Quintell** as William Barfée (*Guys and Dolls* with Diablo Theatre Company, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* with Altarena Playhouse).

The artistic team includes **Kimberly Dooley** (*The Wiz*, *Seussical the Musical* and several YouthStage productions with Berkeley Playhouse) as director and choreographer, music direction by **Olivia Gomez**, scenic and lighting design by **Mark Hueske**, sound design by **Kristoffer Barrera**, and costume design by **Heidi Hanson**.

FRIENDS OF THE BERKELEY PUBLIC LIBRARY:

Berkeley Playhouse is proud to partner with the **Friends of the Berkeley Public Library** for the run of **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE**. **Friends of the Berkeley Public Library** is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to support and expand the educational, cultural, and outreach programs of the Library. Berkeley Playhouse will be collecting used books offering a 10% discount on tickets to patrons who pledge to donate used books. At the end of the show run all donated books will be handed over to **The Friends of the Berkeley Public Library**. Supported programs of these fundraising efforts include Children's Summer Reading Programs, Teen book clubs, and the adult literacy program, Berkeley Reads.



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“The Friends of the Berkeley Public Library is delighted to be a partner with Berkeley Playhouse in this production of *The Spelling Bee*. We are great fans of theater, and as purveyors of gently used books, we appreciate works of the imagination—and good spelling--whether between the covers of a book or onstage.”

– Sandy Bails, President of Friends of the Berkeley Public Library

ABOUT BERKELEY PLAYHOUSE:

Berkeley Playhouse was founded in 2007 by professional theatre actor, director, and teacher for over 25 years **Elizabeth McKoy**. Along with Managing Director **Lauren Hewitt**, Artistic Director McKoy has developed Berkeley Playhouse into a professional musical theatre providing children and families a unique and sophisticated experience. Berkeley Playhouse offers a range of skill and performance classes for ages 3–17 through several after-school and school break educational programs. In 2009, Berkeley Playhouse made the historic Julia Morgan Theater its permanent home.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

No musical exemplifies the humor and poignancy of adolescence better than **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE**. This unlikely hit musical comedy chronicles the experiences of six adolescent outsiders vying for the spelling championship of a lifetime, and grown-ups who barely managed to escape childhood themselves. Winner of the 2005 Tony Award for Best Book of a Musical, this hilarious and warmhearted tale of overachievers’ angst celebrates the triumph of doing the best you can. Honest and heartfelt songs such as “I’m Not That Smart,” “I Speak Six Languages,” and “My Friend, The Dictionary,” remind these tenacious tweens that winning isn’t everything and losing doesn’t necessarily make you a loser. Complete with audience participation and improvised moments, no performance of this sidesplitting musical is ever the same!

DATES:

Previews: Saturday, April 5 at 1pm

Opens: Saturday, April 5 at 6pm



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Press: Saturday, April 5 at 6pm; Sunday, April 6 at 12pm and 5pm

Closes: Sunday, May 4 at 5pm

All performances: Fridays at 7pm; Saturdays at 1pm and 6pm; Sundays at 12pm and 5pm.
Performances on select Thursdays at 7pm.

WHERE:

Berkeley Playhouse at the Julia Morgan Theater. 2640 College Ave. Berkeley, CA 94704

TICKETS:

For tickets (\$17–\$60) or more information, the public may visit www.berkeleyplayhouse.org or call (510) 845-8542 x351. Group rates available for 10 or more people.

PHOTOS:

High-resolution photos for **THE 25th ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE** are available at berkeleyplayhouse.org/about/press-room/ or upon request by emailing ken@berkeleyplayhouse.org

Berkeley Playhouse gratefully acknowledges the following for their support: The Alameda County Arts Commission, City of Berkeley Civic Arts Commission, Extreme Pizza, The Imagination Foundation, and individual donors.