



**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY
ANNOUNCES 2016-17 SEASON**

*Acclaimed intimate theater to present
U.S. Premiere from Steve Waters;
West Coast Premiere from Keith Josef Adkins;
Bay Area Premiere from Sarah Greenman;
Bay Area Premiere from Abi Morgan;
Tom Stoppard classic;
Dorothy Bryant revival*

BERKELEY, Calif. (March 31, 2016) – Berkeley’s acclaimed **Aurora Theatre Company** proudly announces the lineup for its 25th anniversary season. The company opens the season with a revival of Dorothy Bryant’s **DEAR MASTER**, directed by acclaimed actress and director **Joy Carlin** and featuring **Kimberly King** and **Michael Ray Wisely**. The company is also poised to present the West Coast Premiere of Keith Josef Adkins’ **SAFE HOUSE**, directed by **L. Peter Callender**. **Timothy Near** returns to Aurora to helm Tom Stoppard’s classic **THE REAL THING**. Lauded Bay Area designer and director **Jon Tracy** returns to direct the Bay Area Premiere of Sarah Greenman’s **LENI**, to be staged in the company’s second stage performance space, Harry’s UpStage, located in the Nell and Jules Dashow Wing. Aurora continues the season with the U.S. Premiere of Steve Waters’ new play, **TEMPLE**, directed by Aurora Artistic Director **Tom Ross**. Closing the season is the Bay Area Premiere of Abi Morgan’s **SPLENDOR**, directed by **Barbara Damashek**.

“With the 25th season, Aurora Theatre Company is telling the story of Barbara Oliver’s little theater at the Berkeley City Club and how it has grown and evolved into the mature institution it is today,” said Aurora Theatre Company Artistic Director Tom Ross. “Way back then, we all thought our humble beginnings at the Berkeley City Club were a risky experiment. Starting a professional Actors’ Equity company in a room that sat only 67 seemed like a financial disaster waiting to happen, but here we are today, spotlighting the talents of local artists and celebrating 25 years of intimate, quality theater.”

Continued Ross, “Our sensational six-play season opens much the same way Aurora did in 1991 with Dorothy Bryant’s *Dear Master*, a stunning dialogue in letters between George Sand and Gustave Flaubert. While *Dear Master* was technically not Aurora’s first show because Aurora as we know it did not exist then, the success of that production gave Barbara the encouragement to start her own

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professional company. Aurora's first leading lady Kimberly King, who starred in Shaw's *Candida*, will play Barbara's iconic role as George Sand. If there is any actor Barbara would relish taking on that role, it would be Kimberly."

"The rest of the season is equally stunning with the U.S. Premiere of a sold-out play I couldn't get a ticket to in London last year, a West Coast Premiere that harkens back to the antebellum South and the Underground Railroad, and Bay Area Premieres that, in their own ways, depict revolutions both personal and political. Season 25 will be a celebration not just of Aurora and its accomplishments, but of the talent and tenacity of some of the very best theater artists in the Bay Area and beyond."

The regular season will be staged September 2016 through July 2017 at the intimate Aurora Theatre in the downtown Berkeley arts district. For single tickets (\$32-\$65) or subscriptions (\$99-\$350), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **auroratheatre.org**. **Subscriptions on sale March 31. Single tickets on sale for subscribers July 26 and on sale August 2 to the general public.**

In chronological order, the Aurora 2016-17 season is as follows:

DEAR MASTER
By Dorothy Bryant
Directed by Joy Carlin
September 2 - October 2, 2016 (Opens: September 8)

Aurora Theatre Company opens its 25th season with a revival of the play that started it all, **DEAR MASTER**. Originally produced at the Berkeley City Club in 1991, starring Aurora founding Artistic Director Barbara Oliver and penned by Berkeley writer **Dorothy Bryant**, **DEAR MASTER** is the flagship play upon which Aurora Theatre Company was built. An intimate dialogue in letters between powerhouse 19th century French novelists George Sand and Gustave Flaubert, **DEAR MASTER** provides flesh and blood portraits of these two famed intellectuals, revealing their fears, desires, abundant wit, and friendship. During a time as violent and politically polarized as our own, Sand and Flaubert, who agreed on virtually nothing and shared an age difference of 20 years, argued vehemently over matters artistic, political, religious, and personal, yet were able to sustain a deep, affectionate, supportive, and respectful relationship, brought to an end only by the death of Sand. **DEAR MASTER**'s deep sharing of the heart and mind makes even the most fiery love affair seem tame.

Joy Carlin (*The How and The Why*, *Talley's Folly*, *Jack Goes Boating*) helms this elegant portrait, hailed as "a splendid achievement" by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and about which the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* declared, "What might have been merely a bookish exercise shimmers with relevant and touching insights into politics, art and life," featuring **Kimberly King** (Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance*), who served as Aurora's first leading lady in Shaw's *Candida*, in the iconic role created by Barbara Oliver, and Bay Area favorite, **Michael Ray Wisely** (*The Letters*, *The Arsonists*).

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SAFE HOUSE

By Keith Josef Adkins

Directed by L. Peter Callender

West Coast Premiere

November 4 - December 4, 2016 (Opens: November 10)

Aurora Theatre Company presents the West Coast Premiere of **Keith Josef Adkins' SAFE HOUSE**. What is family? Who deserves our loyalty and protection? What does it really mean to be free? Set in Northern Kentucky in 1843, nearly two decades before the start of the Civil War, **SAFE HOUSE** explores the lives of one free family of color and the tensions that arise when two brothers have conflicting dreams about how to secure their futures. The Pedigrews are free people of color, a unique position in their antebellum community. While one brother strives to open a shoe business and create a successful life for his family, the other risks everything to help slaves escape. When a fugitive comes knocking, the brothers' freedom, loyalty, and dreams are put to the test. Inspired by Adkins' ancestors, this riveting, heart-wrenching story of love and survival rejects the notion of a world painted black and white.

African-American Shakespeare Company Artistic Director **L. Peter Callender**, who appeared in the Aurora Theatre Company productions of *Breakfast With Mugabe*, *The Soldier's Tale*, and *Permanent Collection*, makes his Aurora directing debut with **SAFE HOUSE**, declared a "wonderfully complex play. Adkins is as hard-hitting as he is poetic" by the *Cincinnati Enquirer* when it premiered at Cincinnati Playhouse in 2014.

THE REAL THING

By Tom Stoppard

Directed by Timothy Near

January 27-February 26, 2017 (Opens: February 2)

Aurora Theatre Company continues its 25th season with **Tom Stoppard's** (*The Coast of Utopia*, *Arcadia*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*) timeless comedy about an all-too-witty playwright who succumbs to the emotional ravages he puts his characters through, **THE REAL THING**. Playwright Henry is not so happily married to Charlotte, the lead actress in his play about a marriage on the verge of collapse. When his affair with their friend Annie threatens to destroy his own marriage, he realizes that life has started imitating art. After Annie leaves her husband for Henry, he can't help but wonder whether their relationship is fiction or the real thing. Delectable and deeply affecting, **THE REAL THING** takes a look at the absolute chaos of love and trust, or lack thereof, and the passions that often blur our perceptions.

Timothy Near ("*Master Harold*" ...and the boys) returns to Aurora to helm this Tony Award-winner for Best Play (1984) and Best Revival of a Play (2000), which *The New York Times* called "Stoppard's most moving play, but also the most bracing play that anyone has written about love and marriage in years," and *The Independent (UK)* declared "Stoppard at his most relatable."

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LENI

By Sarah Greenman

Directed by Jon Tracy

Bay Area Premiere

March 10-April 23, 2017 (Opens: March 16)

Can an artist ever be truly “apolitical” if their work serves the ends of powerful political forces? In Aurora’s Bay Area Premiere of **Sarah Greenman**’s wildly creative biographical play, **LENI**, German film director Leni Riefenstahl’s evasive older self and seductive younger self work to edit the perfect film of her life. Riefenstahl’s two most famous films, “Triumph of the Will” and “Olympia,” are still recognized as works of cinematic brilliance even as they are reviled as propaganda for the Nazi regime. With **LENI**, Greenman explores the controversial Riefenstahl, whose work in the 1930’s was comparable to the films of Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock, but embodied some of the most troubling contradictions of her time.

Riefenstahl’s influence is deeply embedded in our culture, from our clothing ads to the way sporting events are shot to how the President lands his plane and makes his entrance. But was she Hitler’s puppet? Was she aware she was making such strong pieces of propaganda for Hitler? Was someone who wanted beauty to be the new religion simply blind to the events happening around her? An intelligent brief on artistic responsibility, influence, and narcissism, **LENI** journeys deep inside the mind and media of an artist to discover why art can be a dangerous business.

Jon Tracy (*The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity, Breakfast With Mugabe*) directs this multi-media play, declared “a thought-provoking tour through the world of Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl. Greenman demonstrates a masterful confidence as her text darts from one decade to the next and one Leni to another. It shouldn’t work, but it does, to stunning effect” by *Seattle Weekly*, and “Equal parts psychodrama, biography, courtroom drama, lecture... this piece takes you deep into [Riefenstahl’s] mind” by *nytheatre.com*. According to the *Seattle Times*, “After seeing *Leni*, you may never look at a Calvin Klein ad in the same way again.”

This production will be presented in Aurora Theatre Company’s second stage performance space, Harry’s UpStage, located in the Nell and Jules Dashow Wing.

TEMPLE

By Steve Waters

Directed by Tom Ross

U.S. Premiere

April 14-May 14, 2017 (Opens: April 20)

Aurora Theatre Company presents the U.S. Premiere of British playwright **Steve Waters**’ (*Little Platoons, The Contingency Plan*) hit play, **TEMPLE**. On October 15, 2011, Occupy London made camp outside St Paul’s Cathedral, one of the most famous, beloved, and recognizable institutions in London. On October 21, a building that was kept open through floods, the Blitz, and terrorist threats closed its doors. A week later the City of London initiated legal action against Occupy protestors to begin removing them, by force if necessary. Beset by problems on all sides, the dean of St Paul’s is simply anxious to resume worship, but the big issue is whether he should support the City in its plan to evict those who’ve set up their tents. Set in the heart of a crisis of conscience, a crisis of authority, and a crisis of faith, **TEMPLE** powerfully demonstrates how even the most liberal and enlightened can fail.

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Declared by the *London Financial Times* to be “a rich, deeply thoughtful piece about contemporary values. Waters draws from recent history a history play in which flesh-and-blood individuals, caught at a pivotal moment, struggle with fundamental questions about what matters,” and about which *The Telegraph (UK)* said, “Call it divine inspiration - but some rare creative power has settled on the playwright Steve Waters...[he has] gone behind the head-lines, and closed ecclesiastical doors, to produce a riveting drama that unpicks the institutional and psychological turmoil the saga caused,” **TEMPLE** premiered at the Donmar Warehouse in 2015. Aurora Artistic Director **Tom Ross** (*Mud Blue Sky*, *A Bright New Boise*, Edward Albee’s *A Delicate Balance*) helms this thought-provoking new play.

SPLENDOUR

By Abi Morgan

Directed by Barbara Damashek

Bay Area Premiere

June 23-July 23, 2017 (Opens: June 29)

Aurora Theatre Company closes its 25th season with Abi Morgan’s (*Suffragette*, *The Iron Lady*, *Shame*, *The Hour*) riveting play about the fragility of power and the unreliability of language, **SPLENDOUR**. In the dripping-with-wealth drawing room of a presidential palace, a Western photojournalist awaits the return of a dictator. She is there to take his picture, only the dictator in question is running very, very late. The sounds of gunfire from the streets and rumors of revolution swirling in the air reveal that something has also gone very, very wrong. The dictator’s wife, her best friend, and an interpreter wait with her. They talk films and Prada shoes, as their fingers lightly tap out the time. All four women harbor secrets and suspicions. All four are in danger. In a fascinating, non-linear structure, this lush piece returns over and over to earlier scenes, each time with the knowledge of what has been uncovered since. Compassionate, dispassionate, and icily probing, **SPLENDOUR** allows a devastating glimpse into the minds of four women as their world turns.

Barbara Damashek (*American Buffalo*) returns to Aurora to helm this drama *The Evening Standard* called “Splendid,” and about which *The Huffington Post* stated, “...how good it [is] to see a play about power and human fallibility told from a female perspective,” and *The Telegraph* said, “In radically showing a tense, fracturing situation from conflicting angles, the play not only represents an inspired marriage of form and content but resonates strongly with our anxious age of ethno-political disintegration. The result is a mixture of perturbing comedy and gathering dread: shards of a drama we must piece together.”

Voted Best Theater Company in 2012 by *SF Weekly*, Aurora Theatre Company continues to offer challenging, literate, intelligent stage works to the Bay Area, each year increasing its reputation for top-notch theater. Located in the heart of the Downtown Berkeley Arts District, Aurora Theatre Company, declared “one of the best regional theaters around” by *7x7* magazine, has been called “one of the most important regional theaters in the area” and “a must-see midsize company” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, while *The Wall Street Journal* has “nothing but praise for the Aurora.” The *Contra Costa Times* stated “perfection is probably an unattainable ideal in a medium as fluid as live performance, but the Aurora Theatre comes luminously close,” while the *San Jose Mercury News* affirmed Aurora Theatre Company is “arguably the finest small theater in the Bay Area,” and the *Oakland Tribune* stated “it’s all about choices, and if you value good theater, choose the Aurora.”

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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SPLENDOUR

By Abi Morgan

Directed by Barbara Damashek

Bay Area Premiere

June 23-July 23, 2017 (Opens: June 29)

Main stage performances: Tuesday at 7pm; Wednesday through Saturday at 8pm; Sunday at 2pm, 7pm
Harry's UpStage performances: Tuesday through Saturday at 8pm; Sunday at 2pm

WHERE: Aurora Theatre Company, 2081 Addison Street, Berkeley, CA

TICKETS: For single tickets (\$32-\$65) or subscriptions (\$99-\$350), the public can call
(510) 843-4822 or visit **auroratheatre.org**

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