



**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY  
ANNOUNCES 2009-2010 SEASON**

*Acclaimed intimate theatre to present World Premiere from lauded playwright  
Joel Drake Johnson; Season to examine "Family and Fortune"*

BERKELEY, Calif. (01 April 2009) – Berkeley’s acclaimed **Aurora Theatre Company** proudly announces the lineup for its 18<sup>th</sup> season. The company will present a season focusing on “Family and Fortune,” opening in August with **AWAKE AND SING!**, Clifford Odets’ legendary Depression-era drama, directed by veteran Bay Area actress and director Joy Carlin. The company is also poised to present playwright Neil LaBute’s **FAT PIG**, an exploration of body image and consciousness in contemporary America, directed by Tony-nominated director Barbara Damashek. Aurora Theatre Company Artistic Director Tom Ross helms the World Premiere of Chicago playwright Joel Drake Johnson’s latest play, **THE FIRST GRADE**, the first main stage production to develop from Aurora Theatre Company’s four-year-old Global Age Project. Aurora Theatre Company founding Artistic Director Barbara Oliver returns to direct Henrik Ibsen’s masterwork **JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN**. Closing the season will be the Bay Area Premiere of Stephen Karem’s innovative comedy **SPEECH & DEBATE** directed by Robin Stanton. As a special addition to the 2009-10 season, the jingle bells will rock again with a new edition of **THE COVERLETTES COVER CHRISTMAS**, which played to sold-out crowds last season. The regular season will be staged August 2009 through July 2010 at the intimate Aurora Theatre in the downtown Berkeley arts district. For single tickets (\$15-\$55) or subscriptions (\$130-\$235), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **auroratheatre.org**.

In chronological order, the Aurora 2009-10 season is as follows:

**AWAKE AND SING!**  
By Clifford Odets  
Directed by Joy Carlin  
**August 21-September 27, 2009 (Opens: August 27)**

Aurora Theatre Company sets the tone for its 18<sup>th</sup> season, opening with Clifford Odets’ classic Depression-era drama **AWAKE AND SING!** First produced in 1935 by the Group Theatre, **AWAKE AND SING!** covers a year in the life of the Bergers, an extended Jewish family who do

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whatever it takes to survive life in the Bronx. Written at the height of the Depression, when economic disorder led to a sudden, urgent questioning of American society, **AWAKE AND SING!** depicts the too true-to-life economic hardships confronted by working-class families during the 1930s, documenting their dreams and disappointments, hopes, fears, and follies in the face of the American dream. **AWAKE AND SING!** garnered two Tony Awards for its 2006 Broadway revival, called a “stirring . . . still pungently funny play . . . [that] reminds us, the song of human aspiration is always sweet to hear” by *The New York Times*, and about which *Variety* said, “the drama’s power creeps up on you. . . the rough-hewn poetry of Odets’ idiomatic language . . . remains intoxicating.” Joy Carlin (*The Price, Hysteria, Jack Goes Boating*), who first directed this play for Berkeley Repertory Theatre 24 years ago, revisits this landmark drama for Aurora.

### **FAT PIG**

**By Neil LaBute**

**Directed by Barbara Damashek**

**October 30-December 6, 2009 (Opens: November 5)**

Cow. Slob. Pig. Size does matter. Bad-boy playwright Neil LaBute continues his exploration of body consciousness in contemporary America with **FAT PIG**, the second play in a trilogy that began with *The Shape of Things* (produced by Aurora in 2003). Conventionally good-looking Tom falls for Helen, a bright, funny, sexy woman, who happens to be plus-sized. Forced to explain his new relationship to his perplexed friends, Tom must come to terms with his own preconceived notions of love and attraction. Premiering at the Lucille Lortel Theater in 2004, this alternately funny and sad play, called “emotionally engaging” by *The New York Times*, and full of what *The Washington Post* dubbed “Labute’s lacerating humor,” not only critiques our adherence to Hollywood’s standards of beauty, but questions our ability to change what we dislike about ourselves. Tony-nominated director Barbara Damashek (*Quilters*) returns to Aurora Theatre Company, where she directed the West Coast Premiere of *Private Jokes, Public Places*, to helm this story about human weakness and the difficulty people face when trying to stand up for, and live up to, something they believe in.

### **THE COVERLETTES COVER CHRISTMAS**

**An Aurora Original Production**

**December 15-27, 2009**

The jingle bells will rock again this holiday season when **THE COVERLETTES COVER CHRISTMAS** returns to the Aurora. In the great tradition of 1960’s girl groups like The Ronettes, The Marvelettes, The Crystals, and The Shangri-Las, legendary (and fictitious) singing sensations The Coverlettes dust off their harmonies and their bee-hives to perform some of pop music’s greatest girl group hits and holiday classics, with a few unexpected musical detours in between. Featuring three of the Bay Area’s finest female vocalists, **Darby Gould** of Jefferson Starship, **Katie Guthorn** (*A Karen Carpenter Christmas*), and Star Search winner **Carol Bozzio Littleton**, and live accompaniment under the direction of **Randy Craig**, this new edition of last season’s tuneful yuletide treat is sure to bring down the house again.

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**THE FIRST GRADE**

**By Joel Drake Johnson**

*World Premiere*

**Directed by Tom Ross**

**January 22-February 28, 2010 (Opens: January 28)**

Aurora Theatre Company presents the World Premiere of lauded Chicago playwright Joel Drake Johnson's **THE FIRST GRADE**. Exploring with great humor and passion the price one pays for being a totally engaged member of the human race, this World Premiere, which originated as one of Aurora Theatre Company's Global Age Project winners last season, follows the sometimes hilarious, sometimes frightening journey of a woman whose attempts to save her physical therapist from harm leads her into a chaos that includes a class of first graders, her depressed daughter, her Ritalin addicted grandson, and an ex-husband with whom she still shares a home. Aurora Theatre Company Artistic Director Tom Ross directs this new play from Johnson, whom *The Chicago Reader* declared "balances gallows humor with acute insight and compassion. He creates characters so real you wonder what will happen to them after the final blackout."

**THE FIRST GRADE** will be produced as the fully-staged anchor production in The Global Age Project (GAP), an Aurora Theatre Company initiative that encourages playwrights and directors to explore life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. In addition, several new plays dealing with global age concerns will be chosen from an international pool of playwrights and presented in a series of developmental readings during the run of **THE FIRST GRADE**.

**JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN**

**By Henrik Ibsen**

**A new version by David Eldridge**

**Directed by Barbara Oliver**

**April 2-May 9, 2010 (Opens: April 8)**

Aurora Theatre Company presents Henrik Ibsen's chilling, fiercely relevant **JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN**. Written in 1896, and recently revived in a new version by David Eldridge at London's Donmar Warehouse to great critical acclaim, Ibsen's penultimate play is a pointed indictment of capitalism, selfish ambition, and greed. The Borkman family fortunes have been brought low by the imprisonment of John Gabriel Borkman, who used his position as a bank manager to speculate illegally with his clients' money, ultimately losing the financial investments of hundreds of people. After serving eight years in prison for embezzlement, Borkman has spent the last five years making plans for a comeback, pacing alone in an upstairs room. Meanwhile downstairs, his estranged wife and her sister vie for the loyalty of Borkman's only son. Aurora Theatre Company founding Artistic Director Barbara Oliver, who directed the company's hit production of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, returns to helm this drama about a family confined by an inescapable, unappeasable past, called a "magnificent" work of art by *The Guardian* (London).

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**SPEECH & DEBATE**  
**By Stephen Karam**  
*Bay Area Premiere*  
**Directed by Robin Stanton**  
**June 11-July 18, 2010 (Opens: June 17)**

Closing Aurora Theatre Company's 18<sup>th</sup> season is Stephen Karam's fiercely funny **SPEECH & DEBATE**, hailed as a "savvy comedy...bristling with vitality, wicked humor, terrific dialogue and a direct pipeline into the zeitgeist of contemporary youth" by *Variety* when it opened off-Broadway at the Roundabout Theatre in 2007. Three teenage misfits in Salem, Oregon discover they are curiously connected by a sex scandal that's rocked their hometown. When the trio (a "drama geek," a "queeny boy," and a budding school newspaper reporter) form an unlikely alliance to seek out and disclose the truth, secrets become currency, the stakes escalate, and their connection grows deeper in their quest for fame and free speech. Robin Stanton (*Betrayed, The Busy World is Hushed, Permanent Collection*) directs this distinctive new play *Entertainment Weekly* called "One of the top ten plays of the year...Even if you're not fluent in IM, you'll LOL at this subversive comedy."

Nominated for 18 Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards for 2007-08, and winner for Best Production and Best Ensemble, Aurora Theatre Company continues to offer challenging, literate, intelligent stage works to the Bay Area, each year increasing its reputation for top-notch theatre. Located in the heart of the Downtown Berkeley Arts District, just steps away from BART, Aurora Theatre Company has been called "one of the most important regional theaters in the area" 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] lives up to its reputation as a theater that feeds the mind," and the *Oakland Tribune* declared "it's all about choices, and if you value good theater, choose the Aurora."

### **FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:**

**WHAT:** Berkeley's acclaimed **Aurora Theatre Company** proudly announces the lineup for its 18<sup>th</sup> season. The company will present a season focusing on "Family and Fortune," opening in August with **AWAKE AND SING!**, Clifford Odets' legendary Depression-era drama, directed by veteran Bay Area actress and director Joy Carlin. The company is also poised to present playwright Neil LaBute's **FAT PIG**, an exploration of body image and consciousness in contemporary America, directed by Tony-nominated director Barbara Damashek. Aurora Theatre Company Artistic

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Performances Tuesdays at 7pm; Wednesdays through Saturdays at 8pm; Sundays at 2pm and 7pm

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

**TICKETS:** For single tickets (\$15-\$55) or subscriptions (\$130-\$235), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **www.auroratheatre.org**.

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges the following foundations and government agencies for their support: Actors' Equity Foundation, Alameda County Arts Commission, Berkeley Civic Arts Program & Civic Arts Commission, Dramatists Guild Fund, The Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, The Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust, Phyllis C. Wattis Foundation, and The Zellerbach Family Foundation.

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