

## For theatergoers, 2009's must-see shows

[By Karen D'Souza](#)  
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It's blue skies ahead for San Jose Repertory Theatre as it soars into the new year with the high-flying blockbuster "The Kite Runner."

The theatrical adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's bestselling debut novel makes its highly anticipated world premiere March 21 through April 19. Adapted for the stage by Matthew Spangler and directed by David Ira Goldstein (who recently helmed "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"), this drama promises to be the centerpiece of the Rep's spring season.

The haunting tale of friendship and redemption in Afghanistan is charted through the lives of two boys coming of age in Kabul in the 1970s. Amir and Hassan grow up in the same household, but issues of class force their lives down starkly divergent paths. A boyhood act of betrayal sets the stage for a lifelong quest for Amir, who flees the country during the Russian invasion, moves to Fremont and becomes a successful novelist before returning to his homeland to revisit his days of kite-running.

Other notable shows at the Rep include Timothy Near's swan song, "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee," a quirky musical hit. The offbeat Tony Award-winning musical, one of the few that delights audiences and critics alike, runs from May 9 to June 7. How do you spell ka-ching? (408) 367-7255 or [www.sjrep.com](http://www.sjrep.com).

There's no place like home? My pretties, get ready for the return of the smash hit "Wicked" to San Francisco, where it made its debut in 2003 before taking Broadway by storm. This "Wizard of Oz" prequel sweeps into the Orpheum Jan. 27 for an open-ended run. Devotees of the emerald-skinned heroine Elphaba (a play on the name of L. Frank Baum) will be eager to head back down the yellow brick road to compare the cast in this production with original stars Idina Menzel and Kristin Chenoweth. (415) 551-2000 or [www.shnsf.com](http://www.shnsf.com).

Fairy tale fans also will want to catch the world premiere of "Ever After," a musical version of the Cinderella story, which dances into San Francisco's Curran Theatre in April. Like "Wicked" way back when, this is a pre-Broadway premiere that gives local audiences a sneak peek before the show takes a bite out of the Big Apple. Based on the hopelessly romantic 1998 movie starring Drew Barrymore as a plucky heroine who needs no prince to save the day, the musical will be directed by Tony Award winner Doug Hughes. (415) 551-2000, or [www.shnsf.com](http://www.shnsf.com).

Berkeley Rep is generating tons of buzz with its world premiere of "In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)." The latest work from hot playwright Sarah Ruhl, whose "Eurydice" had local audiences smitten back in 2004 — long before she came to national fame — this is a poetic look at history, gender and sexual politics. The 50th world premiere from the ever-adventurous Rep, Ruhl's piece will be directed by her "Eurydice" collaborator, Les Waters. It runs Jan. 30-March 15. Incidentally, the director will return later in the season with "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," the latest dark parable from Martin McDonagh (known to film fans for "In Bruges"). The Quentin Tarantino of the theater world, he scared the pants off us with "Pillowman" (2007). The new drama runs April 17-May 17. (510) 647-2949 or [www.berkeleyrep.org](http://www.berkeleyrep.org).

Socially savvy playwright Lisa Loomer, who raised eyebrows and issues with her acute drama "Living Out," returns to TheatreWorks with "Distracted," a cautionary tale for the ADD-age. This postmodern "dramedy" spins around a little boy named Jesse, whose mom is at her wits' end trying to do right by him amid the 24/7 pressure cycle of the world today. The play makes its regional premiere April 1-26. (650) 463.1960 or [www.theatreworks.org](http://www.theatreworks.org).

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