

S.J. Rep announces lineup for its 30th anniversary season

By Karen D'Souza

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San Jose Repertory Theatre will celebrate its 30th-anniversary season with a festive lineup that honors the company's past but also breaks new ground with numerous premieres and two musicals. It's also a veritable reunion of beloved artists who have made their mark at the Rep.

"For this celebratory season I've tried to include references to both our past and our future, with a world premiere, artists with whom we've had long and satisfying relationships," says artistic director Rick Lombardo, "and plays that speak to our audience here in the South Bay."

Lombardo will direct the ultimate love letter to a life on the stage, "The Dresser," starring Bay Area treasures Ken Ruta and James Carpenter. The classic tale of a London theater company during World War II captures the tenacity, insanity and nobility of artists who will risk it all for their art. Ruta ("Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde") and Carpenter ("As You Like It") are consummate actors who have so long labored on area stages that it is impossible to imagine the regional theater scene without them. It will run Jan. 27 through Feb. 20, 2011.

Noted Bay Area playwright Philip Kan Gotanda ("Wind Cries Mary," "Sisters Matsumoto") returns to the Rep for the world premiere of a provocative romantic comedy about race and relationships, "Love in American Times" (May 12-June 5, 2011). Here he explores the nature of love and power in an arranged marriage between a white man and an Asian woman.

"It is a testament to San Jose Repertory and Rick Lombardo's forward-looking vision of American theater that they are willing to give original, provocative stories a home," says Gotanda, who is famed for mining the explosive territory of ethnicity in plays such as "Yankee Dawg You Die" and "Ballad of Yachiyo."

The Rep, founded by James Reber, staged its first play back in 1981 at a time when the valley was far better known for high tech than high art. Since then, the company has established itself as the city's premiere theater. That's why this anniversary is a huge marker in the life of the Rep and the community it serves.

"Thirty years is one of those milestones," Lombardo says. "There are probably middle-aged adults coming to the Rep now who may have seen their first play as a youngster in the Rep's early days. That shared history is a pretty powerful bond."

Still, there's no time for the Rep to sit on its laurels. In the face of an uncertain economy, the theater is working harder than ever to stay connected to its audience.

Lombardo calls the anniversary "a reminder that those of us, like me, who are fortunate to be leading the Rep at this point in time have a responsibility to keep it moving, growing, changing and responding to the issues of the day, so that it will still be a relevant institution in another 30 years."

Toward that end, the theater is launching a new educational outreach program, the Rep on Tour, which will perform classic plays (starting with "The Glass Menagerie") at high schools, in an age of slashed budgets. That program kicks off this fall.

The six-show lineup also includes the West Coast premiere of "Secret Order" (Oct. 14—Nov. 7), another brainy thriller from Robert Clyman ("Tranced"); the West Coast premiere of Frank Higgins' "Black Pearl Sings" (Sept. 2—26), a soulful tale of music and history (directed by Lombardo); and, for the holidays, the effervescent Ginger Rogers musical "Backwards in High Heels" (Nov. 24—Dec. 19).

One show remains to be announced.

Season subscriptions, which are now on sale, range from \$125 to \$325. All shows are performed at the Rep, 101 Paseo de San Antonio in downtown San Jose. Details: 408-367-7255 or www.sjrep.com.

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The Reps" 30th season

The San Jose Repertory Theatre"s 30th anniversary season will include:

"Black Pearl Sings,"

by Frank Higgins,

Sept. 2"Sept. 26

"Secret Order,"

by Robert Clyman,

Oct. 14"Nov. 7

"Backwards in High Heels," Nov. 24"Dec. 19

"The Dresser,"

by Ronald Harwood,

Jan. 27"Feb. 20, 2011

"Love in American Times,"

by Philip Kan Gotanda,

May 12"June 5, 2011

PLUS one show to be announced at a later date.

Tickets: \$125-\$325, 408-367-7255, www.sjrep.com