



PRESS RELEASE
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**AURORA THEATRE COMPANY SAVED
BY EMERGENCY FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN**

**Celebrated 33-year-old Berkeley theatre
to continue with its 2024/2025 Season.**

BERKELEY, CA (August 14, 2024) Berkeley's acclaimed Aurora Theatre Company (Artistic Director **Josh Costello**) announced today that the 32-year-old organization will stay open to start its 2024/2025 Season after a successful emergency fundraising campaign, support from the City of Berkeley, and a restructure of its administrative staff.

Since the pandemic, theaters across the country and in the Bay Area have faced a delay in audiences returning and a consequent loss of income, even as expenses have skyrocketed due to inflation and other factors. In the first four years of the pandemic, Aurora survived on large deficit budgets thanks to one-time windfalls (such as the Shuttered Venues Operating Grants) and a substantial amount of pre-pandemic savings.

"We figured the only way to survive in the long run was to rebuild our audience," said Josh Costello, Aurora's Artistic Director since 2019. "And we wouldn't be able to bring back our lapsed subscribers or welcome new theatregoers if we weren't presenting plays."

Over the past four years, Aurora has presented a heady mix of highly-acclaimed productions, including Liz Duffy Adams' **BORN WITH TEETH**, Dominique Morriseau's **PARADISE BLUE**, and the world premiere of Dustin Chinn's **COLONIALISM IS TERRIBLE, BUT PHO IS DELICIOUS**. Single ticket sales have been inconsistent, but subscription numbers have

been increasing over the last two seasons and 2023/2024 season closer **THE LIFESPAN OF A FACT** sold well in July. Meanwhile, Jonathan Spector's **EUREKA DAY**, which Aurora commissioned, developed, and premiered in 2018, had a star-studded run at the Old Vic in London and will open on Broadway this December.

In spring 2024, Aurora's savings dropped to a level that prompted an emergency fundraising campaign. "First we needed to raise extra money to be able to finish out our 2023/2024 Season," said Managing Director Robin Dolan. "And then we needed to raise more money and make a new plan for a 2024/2025 Season that does not depend on audiences suddenly returning to pre-pandemic numbers. The new budget is still very tight and depends on continued support from our community."

Aurora raised over \$200,000 from a group of major donors, and as much again from a public emergency fundraising campaign, attracting donations from hundreds of supporters. Aurora's Board of Directors offered a \$57,000 match as part of the campaign, and a longtime supporter offered an additional \$25,000 match, which took the total over \$250,000. Separately, a group of former board members also convened and contributed over \$40,000.

At the same time, Aurora petitioned the Berkeley City Council for emergency funding, with a change.org petition attracting over 1800 signatures. Councilmember Sophie Hahn introduced a budget referral for \$150,000 for Aurora, which she described as "a vital addition to Berkeley's arts and culture scene for 32 years." Her referral continued, "Berkeley cannot lose another vibrant cultural asset. A thriving arts district is essential to downtown Berkeley's continued recovery and revitalization." The council unanimously passed the budget with the funding for Aurora on June 25.

"This has been a difficult time, to say the least," said Rebecca Parlette, the company's Interim Board President. "But this is such a beloved organization. We are so pleased to see the community come together to save Aurora."

These successes were one-time windfalls. To create a sustainable future, Aurora is going through a major restructuring of its administrative staff in order to address the structural deficit it has faced since the pandemic. Layoffs include the Marketing and Development departments as well as one of the two Co-Managing Directors. The remaining Managing Director and the Artistic Director will be taking significantly reduced salaries, and the remaining staff will be taking small furloughs. In a cost-saving measure, Aurora is contracting out large portions of the work formerly done by staff members.

The production department remains intact, and Aurora's 2024/2025 Season will proceed mostly as planned. Costello will not be directing in 2024/2025, in order to spend more time on administrative duties. He was previously announced as the director of Noël Coward's **FALLEN ANGELS**, opening in October 2024; a production that will now be directed by former Aurora Artistic Director Tom Ross. Jennifer King (**HURRICANE DIANE**) will direct **THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE**, previously announced with Tom Ross directing. Lloyd Suh's **THE HEART SELLERS** (a coproduction with Capital Stage and TheaterWorks Silicon Valley) and Lynn Nottage's **CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY** will continue as planned, under the direction of Jennifer Chang and Elizabeth Carter, respectively. The season also includes a workshop performance of a new hip-hop musical commissioned by Aurora from Bay Area troupe **Felonious**.

Aurora also announced a staged reading of the Broadway draft of **EUREKA DAY**, featuring the cast of Aurora's world premiere production, as a fundraising event (with special guests to be announced) on September 23.

"I am so moved by the way this community has stepped up," said Costello. "Artists, patrons, donors, and even city officials have all gone out of their way to let us know how much this organization means, and how much they want us to continue. We've had to make some very difficult choices to create a path forward, and we're all very sad to say goodbye to staff members who have done years of tremendous work with Aurora. I am optimistic about our future and I can't wait to share more inspiring plays with this beautiful community."

Aurora's 2024/2025 Season show lineup is as follows:

2024/2025 SEASON

FALLEN ANGELS

By **Noël Coward** | Directed by former Aurora Artistic Director **Tom Ross**

October 19 - November 17, 2024 (Press Night: October 24, 2024)

Intimate. Insatiable. Insufferable.

Five years into their supposedly happy marriages, Jane and Julia's perfectly polished lives are thrown into delightful disarray when an old flame announces his sudden return to London. Past passions and present desires – along with generous helpings of champagne – send the two friends into a frenzy of anticipation, jealousy, and determination to choose their own destinies. Set in the glamorous 1920s, this classic

from the famously witty and charming Noël Coward is a hilarious excavation of the complexities of love and desire.

“An irresistible romp!”
– *The Los Angeles Times*

FELONIOUS CABARET

A Special Limited Engagement

December 6-7 & 13-15, 2025

Featuring Bay Area artists **Carlos Aguirre (aka Infinite), Keith Pinto, Tommy Shepherd (aka Emcee Soulati), Dan Wolf**, hip hop theater collective **Felonious** has been a force in the Bay Area theater and music scene for more than 25 years, often merging the two mediums to create intelligent, socially and politically-conscious, community-minded projects and productions that tell the stories of marginalized people and communities. From live hip hop musical performances to award-winning theater productions such as *Angry Black White Boy*, *Stateless*, and *Beatbox: A Raparetta*, this collective of rappers, actors, beat boxers, musicians, dancers, and writers are known to turn hip hop shows into ass-shaking musical theater.

Join **Felonious** – Aurora’s 2023 Originate+Generate commissioned artists – for an evening of exhilarating hip hop theatre, as they share excerpts from their upcoming O+G world premiere musical.

*This special event is available as an add-on to an
Aurora four-play subscription.*

THE HEART SELLERS

A Regional CoProduction with TheatreWorks Silicon Valley & Capital Stage

By **Lloyd Suh** | Directed by **Jennifer Chang**

Northern California Premiere

February 8 - March 9, 2025 (Press Night: February 13, 2025)

Intimate. Interwoven. Inviting.

Luna and Jane are both immigrants to the United States, alone on Thanksgiving while their husbands are on rotation at the hospital. Still, they are determined to try and make something of their new country’s holiday. Over a bottle of wine and an ill-attempted

turkey, the two near-strangers bond over the dreams of possibility promised in their new home, and the painful loneliness of missing the homes they left behind. Against the backdrop of the Hart-Celler Act opening a path to citizenship for professional workers, playwright Lloyd Suh explores the experiences of Asian immigrants in the 1970s in this funny and moving two-hander.

“In a nation of immigrants, this story belongs to everyone.”

– *The Somerville Times*

CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY

By **Lynn Nottage** | Directed by **Elizabeth Carter**

April 26 - May 25, 2025 (Press Night: May 1, 2025)

Intimate. Incisive. Incandescent.

After Ernestine Crump’s mother dies, her father relocates the family from Pensacola to Brooklyn in a frenzied search for spiritual enlightenment. There, the Crumps find themselves right in the heart of the shifting social politics of 1950s America, which land on their doorstep in the form of unmarried, hard-drinking, Communist-leaning Aunt Lily. Through the observations and narration of Ernestine, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage weaves the tumultuous interplay of race, sex, politics, religion, and post-war sentiment of the era into a colorful and poignant story of one family’s heartbreak, resilience, and joy.

“*Crumbs From the Table of Joy* [is] a small window into the past, and this almost voyeuristic glimpse is worth attention.”

– *New York Post*

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

By **Jane Wagner** | Directed by **Jennifer King**

July 12 - August 10, 2025 (Press Night: July 17, 2025)

Intimate. Infamous. Incurable.

Jennifer King (HURRICANE DIANE) directs a new production of the brilliant and hilarious one-woman show originally written for Lily Tomlin. Through the eyes of a lovable and eccentric bag lady with a sharp wit and a heart as vast as the cosmos she

ponders, Wagner weaves a rich tapestry of interconnected stories that celebrate a mosaic of humanity in all its beauty, chaos, and contradiction. One woman plays a whole cast of quirky and unforgettable characters, revealing the invisible threads that connect us all.

“A true goosebump experience.”

– *The New York Times*

Full-season (2024/2025), 4-play subscriptions and flex passes are currently available (\$140-\$260) and offer priority seating, easy exchanges, missed performance and guest discounts, and more. Additionally, and for the first time ever, Aurora will offer a 4-play streaming subscription, priced at \$72. Single tickets (\$38-\$68) are available now.

Current full-time educators receive 20% off subscription prices, and active and retired military personnel also receive 20% off subscription prices through Theatre Communications Group's Blue Star Theatres program. Patrons 35 and under are eligible for half-price subscriptions, and deeply discounted subscriptions are available for full-time college and high school students.

Returning Aurora subscribers and longtime patrons should note the following minor changes that will go into effect at the start of the new season on August 1:

- First Preview is now on Saturday at 8 p.m., not Friday at 8 p.m.
- All Thursday and Friday performances will now begin at 7 p.m., not 8 p.m.
- Saturday matinee performances (2 p.m.) will be available for the final three weeks of each run.

For subscriptions or single tickets, or if you have questions, the public can call 510.843.4822 or visit auroratheatre.org.

CALENDAR EDITORS

Berkeley's acclaimed Aurora Theatre Company (Artistic Director **Josh Costello**) is moving forward into its 2024/2025 Season after a successful fundraising campaign. Aurora announced changes to the directors of two the four plays (and one special event) that will comprise the

theatre's 33rd season, beginning in October with Noël Coward's **FALLEN ANGELS**, Noël Coward's hysterical comedy of excavation of the complexities of love and desire. Former Aurora Artistic Director Tom Ross will direct.

December brings a special limited engagement with longtime Bay Area hip-hop and theatre troupe **FELONIOUS**, who'll perform excerpts from their upcoming world premiere musical. Aurora commissioned the group in 2023 through its Originate+Generate new play program.

2025 begins with the Northern California Premiere of Lloyd Suh's **THE HEART SELLERS**, in a rare and unprecedented regional co-production with TheatreWorks Silicon Valley and Sacramento's Capital Stage. Aurora is the play's second stop in this three-part co-production directed by Jennifer Chang.

The spring will feature **CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY**, a beautifully moving play from two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage about a Black family trying to navigate the radically shifting social politics of the early 1950s after relocating from Florida to Brooklyn, New York. Elizabeth Carter (STOOP STORIES) directs.

And last, but certainly not least, Aurora will close its 2024/2025 Season with **THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE**, Jane Wagner's brilliant and hilarious play written for Lily Tomlin that has one woman playing a whole cast of quirky characters and drawing unexpected connections between them. Jennifer King (HURRICANE DIANE) directs this uproarious one-woman show that asks the biggest questions of all.

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Starts **October 19, 2024**

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THE HEART SELLERS

A Regional CoProduction with TheatreWorks Silicon Valley & Capital Stage
By **Lloyd Suh** | Directed by **Jennifer Chang**
Northern California Premiere
Starts **February 8, 2025**

CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY
By **Lynn Nottage** | Directed by **Elizabeth Carter**
Starts **April 26, 2025**

THE SEARCH FOR SIGNS OF INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE
By **Jane Wagner** | Directed by **Jennifer King**
Starts **July 12, 2025**

PERFORMANCES Tuesday through Friday at 7 p.m.

Saturday at 2 p.m. (3rd, 4th, and 5th Saturdays only)

Saturday at 8 p.m.

Sunday at 2 p.m.

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

TICKETS For single tickets (\$38-\$68) or subscriptions (\$140-\$260), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **www.auroratheatre.org**.

Single tickets on sale now.

ABOUT AURORA THEATRE COMPANY

As the storyteller for our community, Aurora Theatre Company inspires new audiences and longtime theatre lovers alike with the visceral power of live theatre. Our venues, the most intimate professional stages in the Bay Area, highlight great acting, nuanced language, and an immediacy that makes for exhilarating theatre. By telling profoundly relevant stories, we're building a new culture of theatregoing in the Bay Area and contributing to a revitalization of theatre nationwide, challenging all of us to think deeper, laugh louder, and engage more purposefully and profoundly with our neighbors and our world.

Aurora has an operating budget of \$2.2 million.

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