

CENTER REPERTORY COMPANY ANNOUNCES 2024-25 SEASON

September 2024 through June 2025 at
Walnut Creek's Leshar Center for the Arts

Season includes two World Premieres, queer take on a theatrical classic, works exploring intergenerational relationships, fireside chat with 'EGOT' winner.

Company also announces expanded audience initiatives including single-price/any-seat subscriptions, added Pay-What-You-Can performances.

WALNUT CREEK, CA (17 April 2024) —Last night, **Center Repertory Company** (Center REP) subscribers and theatre enthusiasts gathered in the Leshar Center for the Arts to listen as the company announced its 57th season—an extraordinary lineup of six works to be presented September 2024 through June 2025—plus an added attraction and new audience initiatives. Center REP Artistic Director **Matt M. Morrow** revealed the four plays and two musicals the company will present in its next season, the first season to be selected by Morrow since their appointment as Artistic Director for the Walnut Creek-based company.

The 2024-25 season lineup includes a dazzling and groundbreaking World Premiere technological noir-thriller, a World Premiere senior sex-scandal musical whodunit, a nationally acclaimed fierce and funny musical solo show spotlighting a Filipina force of nature, a queer and campy take on the grandmother of dark comedies featuring a Bay Area favorite, an odd couple comedy full of twists and turns, and the return of a beloved holiday favorite. Subscriptions are available now at **CenterRep.org**. Single tickets will be available beginning July 24, 2024.

“For this coming season, I’ve been drawn to stories that use comedy as the doorway to explore curiosity, and how that can lead to unexpected places,” said Morrow. “Our final choices share the common theme of mischief, binding the season as a cohesive journey. This collection of works also celebrates the rich relationships between the older and younger generations, which I personally find deeply healing. And as a long-time champion of new work, I’m especially excited to introduce two World Premieres to Bay Area audiences, which aligns with the shared Strategic Plan of the Leshar Center and Center REP. As the theatre industry continues to rebound from the pandemic, partnership and collaboration is the name of the game. I’m also thrilled to partner with two Bay Area theatrical powerhouse companies to bring engaging, inclusive, and dynamic stories to our larger community.”

In addition to the six productions in its 2024-25 Season, the company also announced a special one-night-only event. Center REP will host Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award-winner **Rita Moreno** for a special conversation about her remarkable career onstage and onscreen, including her roles in *West Side*

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Story, Singin' in the Rain, The King and I, The Ritz, and the recent Netflix hit "One Day at a Time," as well as the importance of robust arts education in our schools and community. **A Fireside Chat with Rita Moreno** will be presented **September 18, 2024**. Patrons who subscribe to the company's 2024-25 Season before April 26, 2024 will receive exclusive access to tickets for this event. Tickets will be available to the public at a later date.

Center REP also announced audience initiatives designed to make attending theatre more accessible: a **new, single-price subscriptions model for all seats and dates** and an **expansion of its popular Pay-What-You-Can performance schedule**. "Subscribing to or attending theatre shouldn't be a complicated negotiation or financial obstacle. We wanted to remove hurdles to create equalized opportunities for all," says Center REP Managing Director **Carolyn Jackson**. "We want our subscribers to know we value them over a seat location or day of the week. We have redesigned our subscription package pricing so that whether you love front row center or last row on the side, or Tuesday or Saturday nights, all tickets for subscribers will be priced at \$49 per show. In addition, we have expanded our Pay-What-You-Can performance schedule so that those who cannot subscribe also have access to dynamic theatre at a price that meets their needs, not ours. We're thrilled to be offering over 3,500 Pay-What-You-Can tickets throughout our 2024-25 season." Pay-What-You-Can performance dates will be announced alongside single ticket sales on July 24.

The season kicks off in the Fall with a new take on Joseph Kesselring's classic, ***Arsenic and Old Lace* (September 8-29, 2024)**. Center REP Artistic Director **Matt M. Morrow** makes her directorial debut with the company, giving the grandmother of dark comedies a mischievous, campy, and queer makeover. Bay Area powerhouse comic actor **Danny Scheie** is lined up to make his Center REP debut as murderous auntie Abby Brewster, leading a cast of LGBTQIA+ actors who will breathe new life into this enduring comedic classic.

Center REP will then present ***Dragon Lady* (October 27 - November 24, 2024)**, in association with **Marin Theatre Company**. Written and performed by firebrand storyteller **Sara Porkalob** (Broadway's *1776*), this fierce and funny musical tour de force spotlights Porkalob's grandmother Maria Porkalob Sr., a charismatic force of nature. With electrifying vocals and a live onstage band, Porkalob personifies dozens of characters to take audiences on Maria's wild journey from a Manila nightclub teeming with gangsters to a Washington state trailer park as a single mother. The first of Porkalob's matrilineal musical trilogy *The Dragon Cycle*, ***Dragon Lady*** premiered at Intiman Theatre, where it was called an "epic, hilarious story of generational healing, resilience, and triumph" by *Seattle Weekly*. *The Boston Globe* hailed Porkalob's "dramatic acting chops that can rivet your attention in a chilling instant," stating "it's not clear to me what, if anything, this incandescent artist cannot do." *KQED* extolled ***Dragon Lady*** at Marin Theatre Company as "a scintillating showcase for the whirling-dervish talents of Porkalob," while *The Mercury News* lauded it as "a triumph. Exquisitely constructed and performed with a ton of humor and heart."

For the holidays, Center REP's stages its ***A Christmas Carol* (December 12-22, 2024)**. Among the most celebrated Bay Area productions of the Charles Dickens classic, this festive favorite has become a beloved holiday tradition for theatre lovers of all ages. Brimming with music and dance, love and

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laughter, and spectacular special effects, critics have called it “The Christmas Carol to see in the Bay Area.”

Center REP will ring in 2024 with the World Premiere of ***Froggy (February 9 – March 2, 2025)***, directed by **Matt M. Morrow**. Written by Susan Smith Blackburn Prize winner **Jennifer Haley** (*The Nether*, Netflix’s “Mindhunter”), this digital thriller combines live performance with groundbreaking digital-media design by Obie Award-winning multimedia artist **Jared Mezzocchi** (*Vietgone*) that will take audiences through a video-game-like theatrical frontier. Set in 2007 during the emergence of motion capture 3D technology, Froggy finds clues about her boyfriend’s disappearance in a violent indie video game. As she delves deeper on a journey melding fantasy, reality, and virtual worlds, she encounters ghosts from her past and uncovers her long-lost lover’s—and her own—fate. Fusing graphic novels, video games, and film noir, this imaginative theatrical event utilizes cutting-edge technology, an original score, and video game-like action. ***Froggy*** received developmental workshops at La Jolla Playhouse, American Conservatory Theater, Andy’s Summer Playhouse, Banff Centre, 3-Legged Dog, and Sundance Theatre Lab ahead of its highly anticipated premiere at Center REP.

In the spring, Center REP will present **Jen Silverman’s *The Roommate (March 30 - April 20, 2025)***. This comedic mystery follows 50-something Iowan divorcee Sharon as she takes in a new roommate: the enigmatic city dweller Robin, also in her 50s and seeking a place to start over. As this odd couple’s friendship deepens, Sharon uncovers secrets that threaten to turn her world upside down in this gripping play full of twists and turns. Premiering at Actors Theatre of Louisville as part of The Humana Festival of New American Plays, ***The Roommate*** has since been seen on stages across the country. *The San Diego Union-Tribune* called it “a funny, free-wheeling and unexpected ride.” *WFPL* lauded the play, stating “Equal parts nuanced and comically exaggerated, ***The Roommate*** addresses themes of aging, femininity, and identity in a fresh, humorous way.”

Center REP will close its season with the World Premiere musical ***Happy Pleasant Valley: A Senior Sex Scandal Murder Mystery Musical (June 1-29, 2025)*** presented in a co-production with **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley**. This new musical features book, music, and lyrics by Bay Area composer/playwright/lyricist **Min Kahng** (*The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*). Set in a senior living community, this lively musical comedy explodes misconceptions about sexuality and aging. An audience favorite at TheatreWorks’ 2023 New Works Festival, this up-to-the-minute work follows internet influencer Jade, who becomes enmeshed in solving mysterious murders in her grandmother June’s residence, Happy Pleasant Valley Senior Apartments. Inspired by their favorite crime-solving heroines, Jade and June join forces to track down the perpetrator in this rollicking comedy which was the recipient of TheatreWorks’ Kurjan/Butler Commission. In-demand director/playwright **Jeffrey Lo**, who helmed Center REP’s *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Red Bike*, returns to direct. This production will open at **TheatreWorks Silicon Valley** in March 2025 before its run at Center REP.

All productions, unless noted, will take place in the intimate Margaret Leshner Theatre at Walnut Creek’s Leshner Center for the Arts.

In chronological order, the Center REP’s 2024/25 season is as follows:

Arsenic and Old Lace

Written by Joseph Kesselring

Directed by Matt M. Morrow

September 8-29, 2024 (opening night: September 14)

The grandmother of dark comedies gets a mischievous and campy makeover as Artistic Director Matt M. Morrow makes their Center REP directorial debut. Newly engaged theatre critic Mortimer discovers his two elderly aunts are harboring some *killer* secrets, just as his estranged brother descends upon the family home, upending everything he thought to be true in his life. To save his family, his fiancé, and his own sanity, Mortimer must learn to navigate a new world gone mad... all while trying to make the 8 o'clock curtain. Deliciously macabre, classically winsome, and queerishly delightful, get ready for a new vision for one of theatre's most enduring comedies. Casting includes the inimitable Danny Scheie as one of the impish aunties.

Joseph Kesselring (Playwright) authored twelve plays, mostly light comedies. His first play to be produced *Aggie Appleby, Maker of Men* premiered in 1933. Four later plays were produced on Broadway: *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *There's Wisdom in Women*, *Four Twelves are 48*, and *Mother of That Wisdom*.

Matt M. Morrow (Director, she/he/they) is the Artistic Director of Center Repertory Company. Bringing more than 20 years of artistic, management, and production experience, Morrow is a visionary theatre professional and an advocate for diversity and inclusivity. They have directed numerous award-winning productions, was the inaugural recipient of the 2021 Larry Baza Arts & Culture Spirit of Stonewall Award for achievement in DEI and cultural contributions to the community of San Diego, and in 2022 was named one of the Top 50 LGBTQ+ Leaders of Influence by the *San Diego Business Journal*. Morrow previously served as the Executive Artistic Director of San Diego's Diversionary Theatre, the third oldest LGBTQIA+ theatre in the nation, where they developed and produced new work through a keen DEI lens. Morrow was also the Associate Artistic Director of City Theatre and has also worked with Amas Musical Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Cherry Lane Theatre, and PlayCo.

Dragon Lady

Written and Performed by Sara Porkalob

Directed by Andrew Russell

In association with Marin Theatre Company

October 27 – November 24, 2024 (opening night: November 2)

On the occasion of her 60th Birthday, Maria Porkalob unspools her mesmerizing origin story to the rapt attention of her granddaughter Sara. In a tour-de-force act of honoring her grandmother's life and legacy, Sara masterfully embodies countless colorful characters from Maria's sensational history—from a Manila nightclub teeming with gangsters and lovers, to a Washington state trailer park where the bonds of family are forged. Chauffeured by a wickedly talented onstage live band and Sara's powerhouse vocals, audiences will be transported by this solo musical adventure that has had critics and audiences across the country on their feet.

Sara Porkalob (Playwright and Performer, she/they) is a storyteller, creative consultant, and artist-activist. She is creator of *The Dragon Cycle*, a trilogy of matrilineal musicals about her Filipino American family: ***Dragon Lady*** (Gregory Award winner

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for Outstanding Musical Production and Outstanding Actress in a Musical), *Dragon Mama* (Elliot Norton Award winner for Best Solo Performance and Best Original Script), and the upcoming *Dragon Baby*. Other works include *The Lamplighter*, *The Angel in the House*, *Angel and Alix*, and *7th and Jackson*. Her work has been seen onstage at American Repertory Theatre, 5th Avenue Theatre, Intiman Theatre, ArtsWest, and Marin Theatre Company. She also won the Princess Grace Award for Theatre. Porkalob is a co-founder of DeConstruct, an online journal of intersectional performance critique. She recently made her Broadway debut playing Edward Rutledge in *1776*.

Andrew Russell (Director, he/him) has collaborated as a director and writer with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, American Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, The Old Globe, The Public Theater, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, The 5th Avenue Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Diversionary Theatre, among others. As the Producing Artistic Director of the Tony Award-winning Intiman Theatre in Seattle from 2011-2017, Russell played a critical role in reorganizing and reopening the theatre after it closed in 2011. He has served as a storytelling consultant for Universal Studios and also makes documentary films.

A Christmas Carol

Written by Charles Dickens

Directed by Scott Denison

Choreographed by Jennifer Perry

Musical Direction by Michael Patrick Wiles

December 12-22, 2024 (opening night: December 14)

PRESENTED IN THE HOFMANN THEATRE at the LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS.

Brimming with music and dance, love and laughter, and spectacular special effects, critics have called Center REP's production "THE *Christmas Carol* to see in the Bay Area," as thousands who make this theatrical event a part of their annual holiday traditions.

Scott Denison (Director, he/him) is the former General Manager of the Lesher Center, and former Managing Director of Center REP. His direction of *A Christmas Carol* has been seen onstage at Center REP since 2001. He also directed Center REP's *The Lady With All the Answers* and served as lighting designer for Center REP's *Shirley Valentine*, *Rumors*, *Becoming Britney*, *A Number*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, and *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*. Other directing credits include work with Contra Costa Musical Theatre.

Froggy

By Jennifer Haley

Director of Creative Technology Jared Mezzocchi

Directed by Matt M. Morrow

World Premiere

February 9 – March 2, 2025 (opening night: February 15)

Nearly a decade in the making, this sensory-rich rollercoaster of a thriller moves theatre from analog to digital in this altogether wild new work from a team of today's groundbreaking theatre artists. It's 2007, and motion capture "3D" animation has taken the film and video gaming industry by storm. For Froggy, it's been a year of obsessing over her actor boyfriend's disappearance. When she discovers clues to his

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whereabouts embedded in a violent, underground video game, Froggy dives down a deadly rabbit hole to uncover his—and her own—fate. From the brilliantly demented minds of Blackburn Award-winner Jennifer Haley (*The Nether*, Netflix's *Mindhunter*), Obie Award-winning multimedia artist **Jared Mezzocchi** (*Vietgone*), and directed by Center REP Artistic Director **Matt M. Morrow**, *Froggy* is next generation storytelling, fusing the styles of graphic novels, film noir, and today's revolutionary virtual media to create a thrilling new theatrical event.

Jennifer Haley (Playwright, she/her) won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for her play *The Nether*, which premiered at Center Theatre Group/Kirk Douglas Theatre and won the Ovation Award for Best New Play. *The Nether* was produced Off-Broadway by MCC Theater and in London by Headlong Theatre and the Royal Court Theatre, before transferring to the West End. *The Nether* has since been produced in 28 countries and translated into 19 languages. Other plays include *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*, a horror story about suburbia and video games, and *Froggy*, a noir thriller with interactive media. Jennifer has developed work at the Humana Festival of New Plays, The Banff Centre, Sundance Theatre Lab, and the O'Neill Playwrights Conference. For television, she has written for Netflix's "Hemlock Grove" and "Mindhunter." She is an alum of New Dramatists in New York City and founder of The Playwrights Union in Los Angeles.

Jared Mezzocchi (Director of Creative Technology, he/him) is a two-time Obie Award-winning theatre artist, working as a director, multimedia designer, playwright, and actor. Mezzocchi's work has appeared at notable theatres nationwide, including The Kennedy Center, Geffen Playhouse, Arena Stage, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, and many more. He received the Obie, Lucille Lortel, and Henry Hewes Awards for his work in Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone* at Manhattan Theatre Club. He won his second Obie as director and multimedia designer of the digital production of *Russian Troll Farm*. Mezzocchi also co-directed *What If Only*, a World Premiere of the new Caryl Churchill play, with Tony Award nominated director Les Waters. Mezzocchi also created and performed two new works of digital theatre during the pandemic: *On the Beauty of Loss* (Vineyard Theatre) and *Someone Else's House* (Geffen Playhouse, LA). Mezzocchi is a two-time MacDowell Artist Fellow and a 2012 Princess Grace Award winner. He is also co-director of The Maya Brin Institute for New Performance, Producing Artistic Director of Andy's Summer Playhouse, and a company member of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Over the pandemic, Mezzocchi founded Virtual Design Collective (VIDCO), which has aided in the development of over 50 new digital works.

The Roommate

Written by Jen Silverman

March 30 – April 20, 2025 (opening night: April 5)

Now in her mid-50's—and recently 'liberated' from her child and husband—Sharon needs a roommate to share her Iowa home. Robyn, also in her mid-50s, seeks refuge and a chance to reboot. When the two become roomies and their odd couple of a friendship deepens, truths emerge, along with hidden talents and secret desires. Part mystery, part comedy and altogether original, this two-hander contemporary classic takes on what it means to be middle aged, middle class, in the middle of America, and how to change it all by throwing caution to the wind.

Jen Silverman (Playwright, they/them) is a New York-based playwright, novelist, and screenwriter. Silverman's plays include *Spain*; *Collective Rage: A Play in 5 Betties*; *The Moors*; *The Roommate*; *Witch*; and *Highway Patrol*. They have been produced Off-Broadway at Second Stage Theater, MCC Theater, The Playwrights Realm, as well as regionally at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, Humana Festival of New American Plays, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Huntington Theatre Company, and South Coast Repertory Theatre. Silverman's work has also been seen internationally in Australia, the UK, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Spain. They are the author of the Lambda Literary Award finalist novel *We Play Ourselves*, the recently released novel *There's Going to Be Trouble*, and the story collection *The Island Dwellers*. Jen wrote "The Miranda Obsession" as a narrative podcast for Audible, starring Rachel Brosnahan. They are a

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three-time MacDowell Fellow and a member of New Dramatists. Honors include the Yale Drama Series Award and fellowships from the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Silverman also writes for TV and film, including Netflix's "Tales of the City" and Max's "Tokyo Vice."

Happy Pleasant Valley: A Senior Sex Scandal Murder Mystery Musical

Book, Music, and Lyrics by Min Kahng

Directed by Jeffrey Lo

World Premiere

Co-Production with TheatreWorks Silicon Valley

June 1-29, 2025 (opening night: June 7)

When internet influencer Jade Park is cancelled online, she seeks redemption by taking on a precarious challenge—helping her rebellious Korean grandmother June, who has the raised eyebrows of many in her senior residential community following a string of mysterious deaths. When the body count starts to rise, the pressure is on Jade to solve the mystery and save her grandmother's (sex) life! This romp of a world-premiere musical explodes the social taboos around aging by celebrating the Boomer spirit and the intergenerational connections that make family worth fighting for.

Happy Pleasant Valley: A Senior Sex Scandal Murder Mystery Musical is the recipient of a Kurjan/Butler commission from TheatreWorks Silicon Valley.

Min Kahng (Book, Music & Lyrics, he/him) is an award-winning playwright, composer, lyricist, and creative coach whose works include *The Four Immigrants: An American Musical Manga*, which debuted in TheatreWorks' 2016 New Works Festival and received a hit production at TheatreWorks in 2017 that won seven San Francisco Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Awards, including "Entire Production – Bay Area." Kahng's other works include *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, *Jin vs. The Beach*, *GOLD: The Midas Musical*, and *The Adventures of Honey & Leon*. Kahng is MacDowell Fellow, a Travis Bogard Fellow, and an alumnus of the Playwrights Foundation Resident Initiative, Berkeley Repertory Theatre's Ground Floor, and Djerassi Resident Artists Program. Kahng is an NEA Grant Recipient, a Jonathan Larson Grant Finalist, a Richard Rodgers Award Finalist, and a Dramatists Guild committee member.

Jeffrey Lo (Director) is a Filipino-American playwright and director who helmed *Every Brilliant Thing* and *Red Bike* at Center REP. He is the recipient of the Leigh Weimers Emerging Artist Award, the Emerging Artist Laureate by Arts Council Silicon Valley, and Theatre Bay Area Director's TITAN Award. His plays have been produced and workshopped at TheatreWorks Silicon Valley, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The BindleStiff Studio, City Lights Theater Company, and The Custom Made Theatre Company. Directing credits include *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The Language Archive*, *The Santaland Diaries*, and most recently *Tiger Style!* at TheatreWorks; *Chinglish*, *Hold These Truths*, *The Paper Dreams of Harry Chin*, and the upcoming *The Glass Menagerie* at San Francisco Playhouse; *Vietgone* and *The Great Leap* at Capital Stage; *Uncle Vanya* at the Pear Theatre (SFBATCC award for Best Production); and *A Doll's House, Part 2* and *Eurydice* at Palo Alto Players (TBA Awards finalist for Best Direction), and many more.

Led by Artistic Director **Matt M. Morrow** and Managing Director **Carolyn Jackson**, **Center REP** is the award-winning resident theatre company of the Leshner Center for the Arts. Founded in 1968, Center REP

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is one of the oldest professional theatres in the region, serving the East Bay and beyond with a diverse program of classic and contemporary works and arts education programs. For nearly six decades, Center REP's legacy endures as a vital community hub that fosters creativity and belonging among audiences and artists alike. Center REP's mission is to celebrate the power of the human imagination by producing emotionally engaging, intellectually involving, and visually astonishing live theatre, and through Outreach and Education programs, to enrich and advance the cultural life of the communities it serves.

For more information the public can visit **centerrep.org**. Subscriptions are now available and single tickets will be available on July 24, 2024.

Media sponsor for Leshher Center for the Arts' 2024-25 season is San Francisco Chronicle.

PERFORMANCES: Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays: 7:30pm
Saturdays: 2:30pm & 7:30pm
Sundays: 2:30pm

WHERE: Leshher Center for the Arts (1601 Civic Dr, Walnut Creek)

TICKETS: For more information, the public may visit **centerrep.org** or call the box office at (925) 943-7469 (*open Wed-Sun, 12:00pm-6:00pm*). Subscriptions are now available and single tickets will be available on July 24, 2024.

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PHOTOS: For high-res photos, please visit: <http://www.cbpr.co/press/centerrep2425season>