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**BEIJING PEOPLE'S ART THEATRE MAKES ITS WEST COAST DEBUT IN
LAO SHE'S MASTERPIECE *THE TEAHOUSE* SATURDAY & SUNDAY,
NOVEMBER 5 & 6 IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

BERKELEY, September 29, 2005 – As part of its American debut tour, the Beijing People's Art Theatre brings its classic production of Lao She's *The Teahouse* to Zellerbach Hall **Saturday & Sunday, November 5 & 6**. The drama—one of the pillars of modern theater in China—is set in a traditional teahouse and chronicles the lives of its owner and his customers, people from all walks of life, through the turbulent Chinese history of the first half of the 20th century. Originally directed in 1958 by Beijing People's Art Theatre's late founder **Jiao Juyin**, the current production was revived by **Lin Zhaohua** and features dozens of vividly created characters. More than half a million people around the world have seen *The Teahouse* in over 500 performances since it was first staged. In Berkeley, the play will be presented with English supertitles.

THE TEAHOUSE

The Teahouse was immediately controversial when Lao She wrote it in 1957. Its naturalistic portrayal of a cross-section of people who visit a Beijing teahouse—and speak in the Beijing dialect—was unlike anything that had been previously seen on the stage in China, even though western-style drama had existed in the country for some fifty years. Indeed, the play's controversial nature has caused it to be quietly removed from the repertoire of the Beijing People's Art Theatre twice, in 1958 after its premiere and again in 1963 after its first revival. One criticism was that the play was too sympathetic to its objectionable characters and had a shortage of positive ones. But the play was revived again in 1979, more than a dozen years after Lao She's death in 1966, and began a remarkable run, both in China and around the world. Hundreds of performances were given in China, Germany, France, Switzerland, Japan, Hong Kong, Canada (at Expo '86 in Vancouver, B.C.), and Singapore. The play was once again

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revived in 1999 with a new generation of actors and Lin Zhaohua as director. It is one of the Beijing People's Art Theatre's signature pieces.

The Beijing People's Art Theatre first staged *The Teahouse* in 1958. The play contains more than 60 characters and covers a span of more than 50 years in three acts -- the first set in 1898, the second in 1918, and the third in 1948. The three acts are roughly coincidental with failed attempts to give China a modern constitution built on the Western parliamentary model. The play presents everyday conversations in these three eras, but also delves into what lies below the surface, providing a convincing three-dimensional image of the periods. The play is an indictment of past social injustices that, in many ways, have never disappeared. *The Teahouse* "is a moving and angry summary of how the same poverty, profiteering and oppression continued to plague the ordinary people of China under whatever rule, from the despotism of the Qing Dynasty through the years of the Republic of China through to the eve of liberation," wrote Lloyd Dyck in reviewing the 1986 production in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. "More, it poetically reminds us of how little we learn from history."

Although the play covers roughly five decades, a core of central characters appear throughout the play and age as the drama progresses. Certain secondary characters - fathers and sons - are portrayed by the same actors to give a sense of continuity.

LAO SHE

Lao She, born in 1899, has long been recognized as one of the greatest stylists of the modern Chinese language. By 1949 he was a well-established novelist, and in that year he took up writing for the theatre in earnest. Lao She believed that the performing arts could reach more of the common people than his printed novels, and he was strongly attracted to modern drama. In 1950 he wrote *Dragon Beard Ditch*, a play about destitute slum-dwellers in southern Beijing that was staged by the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1951 and became an instant success. In

that year Lao She was given the title of "People's Artist" -- the only author given that designation in the history of the People's Republic of China. Around that time Lao She met one of the founders and the general director of the Beijing People's Art Theatre, Jiao Juyin. The Beijing People's Art Theatre produced a half-dozen of Lao She's plays from 1951–1957, including the popular comedy *Girl Shop Assistants* and an adaptation of his novel, *Rickshaw Boy*. The idea of a teahouse as a microcosm for society appeared in at least two of Lao She's plays of this period; the concept was expanded into its own drama with *The Teahouse*.

BEIJING PEOPLE'S ART THEATRE

Founded in 1952, the Beijing People's Art Theatre enjoys a distinguished worldwide reputation, with more than 12,500 performances of 250 plays over half a century. In the 1950s and 1960s, the theatre was famous for staging works by playwrights Guo Moruo, Lao She and Cao Yu, including *Tiger Tally*, *Dragon Beard Ditch*, *Thunderstorm*, *The Death of a Popular Beijing Opera Singer*, and western plays like *The Miser* by Moliere and *Even a Wise Man Stumbles* (Alexander Ostrovsky).

Since the 1980s the theatre has staged more than 80 productions, mixing prominent western dramas such as *Amadeus*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Gin Game* with Chinese plays including *Weddings and Funerals*, *The Top Restaurant*, *Beijing Masters*, and *Uncle Doggie's Nirvana*. The Beijing People's Art Theatre was the first Chinese drama company to tour internationally and has done so extensively. The troupe also maintains three venues in Beijing: the 970-seat Capital Theatre, the 400-seat Mini Theatre, and the 250-seat Experimental Theatre.

JIAO JUYIN

Renowned dramatist, translator, and director **Jiao Juyin** served as general director of the theatre in the 1950s and 60s. In addition to being one of the founders of Beijing People's Art Theatre, he acquired a reputation for interpreting Lao She's plays and training young actors. In 1930, he set up the Peking Traditional Chinese Opera School. Jiao Juyin studied in France and Belgium from 1935 to 1937, and received a PhD from the Sorbonne in Paris. He taught in the China Traditional Theatre School in the 1940s, and founded the Beijing Art Center in 1947. He

also acted as the dean of the Department of Literature in Beijing Normal University, and as the dean of the Directing Department at the Beijing Art Academy.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for Beijing People's Art Theatre on **Saturday, November 5 at 8:00 p.m.** and **Sunday, November 6 at 3:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$32.00, \$46.00, and \$68.00.** Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Saturday, November 5 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 6 at 3:00 p.m.

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus

Bancroft Way at Telegraph Ave., Berkeley

Theater

Beijing People's Art Theatre

The Teahouse by Lao She

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