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MEDIA CONTACT
Dayna Kalakau
dkalakau@auroratheatre.org

**MICHAEL GENE SULLIVAN'S ADAPTATION OF *1984*
ARRIVES AT AURORA THEATRE COMPANY FOR ITS
BAY AREA PREMIERE DIRECTED BY BARBARA DAMASHEK**

Bay Area local legends Sullivan and Damashek team up to present a haunting and far-too-present vision of Orwell's dystopian future.

BERKELEY, CA (Oct 11, 2023) Aurora Theatre Company continues its 32nd season with the Bay Area premiere of **Michael Gene Sullivan's** (*Widower's Houses, Satellites*) internationally acclaimed adaptation of George Orwell's **1984**. With translations in six languages, Sullivan's adaptation of **1984** has been performed in Ukraine, China, Spain, Italy, Scotland, and across the United States, and now returns home to the Bay Area with this new production at Aurora. Tony Award-nominated **Barbara Damashek** (*The Children, Creditors, A Number*) directs **David Bryant, Daniel Duque-Estrada, Warren David Keith** (*Widower's Houses, The First Grade, The Devil's Disciple*), **Brady Morales-Woolery** (*Born With Teeth*), **Joseph Patrick O'Malley** (*Colonialism Is Terrible, But Pho Is Delicious; Creditors; A Number*), and **Megan Soledad** in this provocative retelling of the prescient novel which resonates more powerfully than ever, asking whether love and freedom can stand up to a fascistic assault on language and thought itself.

1984 will be presented in-person on Aurora's mainstage from **November 10-December 10 (Opening Night: November 16)**.

Aurora will also offer a week of streaming **1984** performances for audiences to enjoy in their homes. Streaming performances will run concurrently with in-person performances from **December 5-10**.

Aurora Artistic Director Josh Costello says: “Michael Gene Sullivan's adaptation of **1984** is one of the smartest plays based on a book I've ever read. The way he chooses to tell the story is fresh and original, while also being quite true to the novel -- which is as relevant right now as it has ever been. The rise of ubiquitous surveillance, our collective relinquishing of privacy to tech companies, and rising authoritarianism around the world all connect to Orwell's vision of a dystopian future.”

Adds playwright Michael Gene Sullivan: “The most obvious difference, though, between our world and that Orwell created is that in his the state is paramount, but in the United States of today the state is more clearly a puppet of Wall Street. Orwell touches on capitalism, false socialism, and Fascism, but his focus was on totalitarianism. We may not have the burned out buildings and bombed cities, but we are teetering on the brink of an Orwellian nightmare, with all the violent oppression, propaganda, and misery - but with lots of cheap luxuries to distract us!”

SYNOPSIS: Adapted from George Orwell by the Bay Area's own Michael Gene Sullivan, **1984** is a ferocious and provocative retelling of the prescient and iconic novel. Big Brother's surveillance state seeks to control not just our bodies but our minds as well, reaching into every corner of our lives. Accused of Thoughtcrime, Winston Smith faces an interrogation that will reveal his struggle for scraps of love and freedom in a world awash with paranoia and violence. Can the yearning for freedom be extinguished? Or is our shared humanity more powerful than any forces of repression? Experience the novel come to life with shocking relevance in this brilliant adaptation on the Aurora stage.

The *South China Morning Post* says “**This adaptation is multi-layered, intense, and disturbing – exactly how it should be.**”

Post show discussions for **1984** will be led by Aurora staff or members of the Creative Team, and hosted after the show on the following days: **Friday, November 17; Tuesday, November 21; Wednesday, November 29; Thursday, December 7.** Aurora INsights, an in-depth conversation about themes of the play offered to Aurora donors of any level, will be held at 4pm on **Saturday, December 2.**

1984 Cast and Creative Team

George Orwell (he/him) was an English novelist, essayist, and critic most famous now for his novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Born Eric Arthur Blair in British-occupied India in 1903, Orwell was educated in England and spent time as a policeman in Burma before returning to England to begin his writing career as an occasional journalist and

the publication of some of his lesser-known novels. In the late 1930s, Orwell fought and was wounded in the Spanish Civil War, which he recounted in his *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). During the Second World War, his growing reputation as an essayist and journalist allowed him to serve as a correspondent and broadcast supervisor for the BBC from 1941 to 1943, and in 1945 *Animal Farm* was published to great acclaim. In the last years of his life, Orwell wrote hundreds of articles and published a collection of his *Critical Essays*, while working on his final novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. After many years of poor health, Orwell passed away in January 1950 at the age of 46, barely six months after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Michael Gene Sullivan (he/him) is an actor, writer, director, blogger, and teacher committed to developing theatre of social and economic justice, of political self-determination, and, of course, musical comedy. Sullivan is also an alum of the nationally-acclaimed Playwright's Foundation, a Djerassi Center Artist Fellow, and in 2022 was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

An accomplished veteran of Bay Area theater, with credits from American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco Playhouse, Theatreworks, The Magic Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, Denver Center Theater Company, The California, San Francisco and Marin Shakespeare companies as well as many others, Sullivan is also a Collective Member and Resident Director of the Tony and OBIE award-winning, always revolutionary, and never, ever silent San Francisco Mime Troupe, where he has written, acted in, and/or directed over thirty plays.

As a playwright Sullivan's work has appeared across the United States, as well as in Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, The Netherlands, Argentina, Australia, the United Kingdom, Columbia, Hong Kong, Canada, China, and Ukraine.

Sullivan's directing credits include work with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, The San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, and The African-American Shakespeare Festival.

Barbara Damashek (she/her) is happy to be back at Aurora after her production of *The Children* (2020), which was the last before the COVID hiatus. For the past year she has been creating new project under an Aurora commission, and last September she directed a staged reading of *Bad Roads* by Natalya Vorozhbyt for the Ukrainian Worldwide Playreading Relief Initiative at the theater. Other previous Aurora productions include: *Creditors*, *A Number*, *Splendour*, *The Lyons*, *American Buffalo*, *Fat Pig* and *Private Jokes Public Spaces*. An award winning director, she has worked at many of the country's leading regional theaters including Oregon Shakespeare Festival, A.C.T., Berkeley Rep, South Coast Repertory Theatre, the Actors Theatre of Louisville, American Repertory Theatre, Trinity Repertory, The Mark Taper Forum, the Denver Center, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and at International Theater Festivals and at the Little Globe Theater in Kirovohrad, Ukraine. She has taught at many of the nation's leading theater conservatories and more recently was a professor at San Francisco State

University. She is best known nationally as the director, composer-lyricist and co-author of *Quilters* which received 6 Tony Nominations in 1985 including 3 for Damashek for Best Direction, Best Original Score, and (with co-author Molly Newman) Best Book Of A Musical.

David Bryant (he/him) has performed on Broadway in *Amadeus*, *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Showboat*. He also starred as the original Marius in *Les Misérables* on Broadway. He can be heard on the Broadway cast recording, and notes that he has sung more Empty Chairs at Empty Tables for benefits than he can remember. He also appeared in the Off-Broadway play, *Appear and Show Cause*, for which he won an Audelco Award for Best Actor. Recent film works include *Estella Scrooge: A Christmas Carol with a Twist*. Television: *Stars in the House*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order SVU*, *Sex in the City*. He is the voice of Sebastian Shaw in the *X-Men* cartoon series.

Since moving back to the Bay Area, Bryant has performed in productions of *Noises Off*, *Enchanted April* (PCRC), *David Copperfield*, *Breaking the Code* (Jewel Theatre), and *Rags* (TheatreWorks). Spanning an acting career of over 30 years in stage, film and television, Bryant has had the pleasure of working with Sir Peter Hall, Ian McKellan, Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine, Sir Trevor Nunn, Bernadette Peters, Mandy Patinkin, Hal Prince, Frank Langella, Elaine Stritch, John McMartin, Jeremy Northam, Vincenzo Natali, Marissa Haggerty among others.

Daniel Duque-Estrada (he/him) makes his Aurora debut. In the Bay Area, Duque-Estrada has worked with the Magic Theatre, Marin Theatre Company, CalShakes, and Shotgun Players. He has also been seen at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (two seasons), The Dallas Theatre Center, and Trinity Repertory Company, where he is currently a Resident Company Artist. Off-Broadway, Duque-Estrada has been seen at The Woman's Project and PlayCo. He holds an M.F.A. in Acting from Brown University/Trinity Rep.

Warren David Keith (he/him) is delighted to return to Aurora where he has previously been seen in G.B. Shaw's *Widower's Houses* (2018), *The First Grade* (2010), *The Devil's Disciple* (2008), *Hysteria* (2007), *A Life in the Theater* (2001), and *Death Defying Acts* (1998). His Bay Area theater credits also include *Macbeth*, *As You Like It*, *Henry IV (pts 1&2)*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale* for California Shakespeare Theater; *King Charles III*, *War Music*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *Mary Stuart*, *Machinal* and *Arcadia* at A.C.T.; *Heartbreak House* and *Rhinoceros* at Berkeley Rep; *An Uncommon Vision*, *The Rules of Charity*, *Mauritius*, and *What We're Up Against* at Magic Theater; *The Nether* and *The Christians* at San Francisco Playhouse; and extended runs at The Marsh Berkeley and The Marsh San Francisco of *Acid Test: The Many Incarnations of Ram Dass*. His screen credits include *The Last Black Man in San Francisco*, *Haiku Tunnel*, *Love and Taxes*, *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *A Serious Man*.

Brady Morales-Woolery (he/him) was most recently seen at Aurora Theatre Company in *Born With Teeth* (2023) in the role of Will Shakespeare. He trained at the University of California at Berkeley. Select theatre credits include *Private Lives* (Victor Prynne, Arizona Theatre Company); *Clue* (Wadsworth, Center Rep); *Romeo y Juliet* (Benvolio, Cal Shakes); *The Curious Case of the Watson Intelligence* (Watson, Shotgun Players); *Twelfth Night* (Cal Shakes); *Once* (42nd Street Moon); *Retablos* (Word for Word); *Bright Shining Sea* (Playground SF); *Barefoot in the Park* (Paul, Willows Theatre Company); *The Kentucky Cycle* (Patrick, Willows Theatre

Company); and *FSM* (Mario Savio, Stagebridge). Feature films include *Quitters*, *Pushing Dead*, *The Internship*, and the upcoming *Avenue of the Giants*.

Joseph Patrick O'Malley (he/him) returns to Aurora having previously appeared in *Colonialism is Terrible, but Pho is Delicious* in 2022. Other Aurora credits include *Creditors* (2019) and *A Number* (2018). Other Bay Area credits include *War of the Roses*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Nicholas Nickleby* at Cal Shakes; *Ms. Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, *Charlotte's Web* at Marin Theatre Co.; *Spamalot!*, *Measure for Measure* at Marin Shakespeare Co.; and *The Liar* at Center Rep.

O'Malley has been seen regionally in *The Gift of Nothing* at the Kennedy Center; *The Tall Girls* at La Jolla Playhouse; and, *Seminar* at B Street Theatre. His motion capture credits include *NBA2K*, *Mafia: Definitive Edition*, *Star Wars: Tales from the Galaxy's Edge*, and *Fortnite*. O'Malley earned an M.F.A. from USC and a B.A. from Santa Clara University.

Megan Soledad (she/her) makes her Aurora Theatre Company debut. Recent credits include *A Chorus Line* (San Francisco Playhouse), *The Woman in The Turn of the Screw* (Town Hall Theatre Company), and *Dancing Home* at the San Francisco Fringe Festival, where she performed with the San Francisco Youth Theatre. Other Bay Area credits include *In the Heights* (Berkeley Playhouse), *The Sound of Music* (Throckmorton Theatre), and *Silent Sky* (Summer Repertory Theatre). Soledad recently earned her master's in opera from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and has a B.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University.

Understudies for **1984** include **David Bryant**, **Cassidy Brown**, **Carla Gallardo**, and more to be announced.

The creative team for **1984** includes **Leah Hammond (they/them)**—Lead Props; **Laura Hicks (she/her)**—Stage Manager; **Kurt Landisman (he/him)**—Lighting Designer; **Dave Maier (he/him)**—Fight Director; **Maggie Morgan (she/her)**—Costume Designer; **Chelsea Pace (she/her)**—Intimacy Director; **Jeff Rowlings (he/him)**—Scenic Designer; **Matt Stines (he/him)**—Sound Designer.

CALENDAR EDITORS

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DATES

Previews: Friday 11/10 and Saturday 11/11 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, 11/12 at 2 p.m.

Tuesday, 11/14 and Wednesday, 11/15 at 7 p.m.

Open: Thursday, November 16 at 8 p.m. (PRESS NIGHT)

Close: Sunday, December 10 at 2 p.m.

Shows: IN-PERSON PERFORMANCES (November 10-December 10):

Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.; Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m.;
Sunday at 2 p.m.

Two performances per week (WEDNESDAY evenings and SUNDAY matinees) are designated mask-required performances. For all other performances, masks will be encouraged but not required.

Aurora's policy will apply to everyone inside the building other than the actors, to include all audience, ushers, and staff.

Learn more about Aurora's updated COVID-19 Infectious Disease Policy at auroratheatre.org/covid19safety.

STREAMING PERFORMANCES (December 5-10):

Each performance is presented as a filmed production for audiences to enjoy in their homes.

Each performance is available for 36 hours, from 12 p.m. on the performance date to midnight the following day.

TICKETS

For single tickets (\$20-\$65), or subscriptions and flex passes (\$102-\$310), the public can call **(510) 843-4822** or visit **www.auroratheatre.org**.

PRESS

Please do not reply to this media advisory for review tickets. Press review invites will be sent to selected media.

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 deeply 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 \$2.3 million.

Aurora Theatre Company gratefully acknowledges Associate Season Sponsors: Craig & Kathy Moody. Associate Sponsors: Ellen & Barry Levine; Thomas Edwards & Rebecca Parlette-Edwards; Alison Teeman & Michael Yovino-Young.

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