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Press kit and photos: thefourthmessenger.com/press

World premiere musical *The Fourth Messenger* Tells the Story of a Modern Buddha

Award-winning Bay Area Playwright Tanya Shaffer returns with her first project since her 2005 smash hit play *Baby Taj*.

Acclaimed singer/songwriter Vienna Teng composes her first musical theater score.

Broadway director Matt August leads an all-local cast and the creative team behind the TheatreWorks production of *Baby Taj*.

San Francisco, December 4, 2012 (updated December 28, 2012): 100 Shades of Green presents the world premiere of ***The Fourth Messenger***, a brand new musical by celebrated local playwright **Tanya Shaffer** and popular singer/songwriter **Vienna Teng**. What if the Buddha were a woman? What if she were alive today? How would the world view her life and teachings differently? Loosely inspired by the life of the historical Buddha, the captivating new musical imagines a modern-day “awakened one” named Mama Sid. When Raina, a young woman with a mission to reveal Mama Sid’s hidden past, arrives in her ashram, Sid’s carefully constructed world starts to fall apart. At once epic and intimate, comic and profound, this world premiere musical explores what it means to be both enlightened and human. Teng’s layered harmonies and intricate, haunting melodies bring the piece vividly to life, adding depth and resonance that linger long after the lights come up. Directed by Broadway’s **Matt August**, *The Fourth Messenger* reunites the award-winning creative team from Tanya Shaffer’s last smash hit *Baby Taj*. *The Fourth Messenger* plays **February 6–March 10, 2013** at the **Ashby Stage** (1901 Ashby Street, Berkeley, CA 94703). Performances are Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7 pm (February 6, 7, and 14 performances are at 8 pm, no performance on February 13 or 20); Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm; and Sundays at 2 pm. Tickets (\$23-\$40, previews on February 6–8 are pay-what-you-can) are available at thefourthmessenger.com.

“I’m thrilled to return to Bay Area stages with this new musical. For years I’ve been drawn to the legend of Siddhartha Gautama—it’s such a mythic, archetypal journey—but I knew I had to find my own way into the story. It wasn’t going to be some historical pageant—it had to be urgent, contemporary, immediate,” said Tanya Shaffer, whose last play, *Baby Taj*, was selected by the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the Oakland Tribune as one of the top ten plays of the year and nominated for a National Theatre Critics Association Steinberg Award for the best play to premiere that year outside of New York City. “Buddha’s teachings are profound, poetic, and timeless,” Shaffer continued, “but there were elements of his life which a modern audience might find troubling. Those elements—the moral questions and conundrums—became my way into this ancient story and provide the juice that drives the narrative forward.”

Along with Shaffer, who's also producing the musical, *The Fourth Messenger* features an all-star team to bring her compelling vision to life. This marks the first musical theater project for beloved indie recording artist Vienna Teng, who has been working with Shaffer for the last six years on developing the piece. Teng's score features her signature contemporary pop sensibility with a heightened theatricality. Although Teng had not worked in musical theater before, Shaffer felt that the innate sense of drama, humor, and emotion in her music were an ideal fit for the intricate musical storytelling the piece required.

"It's been a steep learning curve," says Teng. "I'm a solitary songwriter, and composing for a theater project has thrown me out of pretty much every comfort zone I have. What has inspired me through it all is the beautiful story Tanya has created and the questions it asks: What is my responsibility as a human being? How do I follow more than one path, more than one calling? And how do I get the voices in my head to shut up once in a while? *The Fourth Messenger* is a beautiful, complex, hilarious, and wise piece of writing, and I just want the music to bring it as fully to life as it deserves."

Also on board is Broadway director Matt August (*Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical*), who has been a longtime collaborator of Shaffer's and directed the world premiere production of *Baby Taj* at TheatreWorks in 2005. August said: "*The Fourth Messenger* takes a classic mythic tale and turns it on its head to bring it into the 21st Century, without losing any of the meaning or emotion of the original. Tanya spins a tale of a young woman coming of age with every theatrical tool available to a modern playwright. It's a story full of surprises and spectacle, emotional characters, heartache, and celebration. Furthermore, it's got one of the most beautiful scores that I've ever had the privilege of working with. Vienna Teng is a perfect match for Tanya. Her music soars above our mundane lives and delivers us to where the gods dwell."

The decision to produce this musical themselves was a bold choice for Shaffer and Teng. Along with the traditional fundraising strategies, the duo was able to raise almost \$40,000 (double their original goal) through a crowd-funding campaign on Indiegogo, making this ambitious production possible. Shaffer says: "The decision for Vienna and me to produce this ourselves came about organically. Talking with theaters, we encountered reluctance to even consider a world premiere musical that required a minimum of nine actors and four musicians in the current economic climate. After a few of those conversations, we came to this Little Red Hen moment of 'I'll do it myself.' The response from supporters was immediate and enthusiastic. It was truly empowering—we live in a time when it's more feasible than ever for artists to take matters into their own hands." *The Fourth Messenger* reunites the award-winning design team from the world premiere production of *Baby Taj* in 2005, including scenic designer Joe Ragey, costume designer

Fumiko Bielefeldt, and lighting designer **Steve Mannshardt** (who worked on *Baby Taj* in a production capacity). They are joined by choreographer **Bridgette Loriaux**, music director **Christopher Winslow**, and orchestrator **Robin Reynolds**. The all local cast for the world premiere musical includes **Jackson Davis** (Andy, et al), **Bekka Fink** (Myra, et al), **Dave Garrett** (Mike, Bread, et al), **Anna Ishida** (Raina), **Barnaby James** (Yasha, et al), **Simone Kertesz** (Priya, Water, et al), **Annemaria Rajala** (Sid), **Cathleen Riddle** (Clara, Mrs. Calamity, et al), **Will Springhorn Jr.** (Sam, Sunny), **Reggie White** (Derekh, Delilah, et al), and **Alexis Wong** (May, et al).

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

What: ***The Fourth Messenger***
A New Musical
Book and lyrics by Tanya Shaffer
Music and lyrics by Vienna Teng
Directed by Matt August

What if the Buddha were a woman? What if she were alive today? How would the world view her life and teachings differently? Loosely inspired by the life of the historical Buddha, the captivating new musical imagines a modern-day “awakened one” named Mama Sid. When Raina, a young woman with a mission to reveal Mama Sid’s past, arrives in her ashram, Sid’s carefully constructed world starts to fall apart. At once epic and intimate, comic and profound, the world premiere musical explores what it means to be both enlightened and human.

When: February 6–March 10, 2013
Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7 pm (no performance on February 13 or 20);
Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm;
Sundays at 2 pm
Preview performances on Wednesday, February 6, and Thursday, February 7,
are at 8 pm.
Special Valentine's Day performance on Thursday, February 14, at 8 pm
includes chocolate and champagne reception.

Where: The Ashby Stage
1901 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94703
Pricing: \$23–\$40
Performances on February 6, 7, 8 are pay-what-you-can.

Info and Tickets: thefourthmessenger.com

* All dates and times are subject to change.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES:

Tanya Shaffer's (Playwright/Lyricist/Producer) plays have been produced by Berkeley Repertory Theatre, San Diego Repertory Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre, TheatreWorks, and the Eureka Theatre, and have toured to more than 40 cities nationwide. Her solo show *Let My Enemy Live Long!* ran for six sold-out months in the Bay Area and was awarded a Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for solo performance. Her play *Baby Taj*, which premiered at TheatreWorks in 2005, was selected by the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Jose Mercury News, and the Oakland Tribune as one of the Top Ten Shows of the Year and nominated for a National Theatre Critics Association Steinberg Award for the best play to premiere that year outside of New York City. It has since been published by Samuel French, Inc. She's also the author of the critically acclaimed travel memoir, *Somebody's Heart is Burning: A Woman Wanderer in Africa*. Her stories and essays have appeared on Salon.com and in numerous anthologies. Ms. Shaffer is currently a resident playwright at Playwrights Foundation. tanyashaffer.com

Vienna Teng (Composer/Lyricist) is a singer, songwriter and pianist who has released four studio albums and one live album on the Virt and Rounder labels. Her albums *Waking Hour* and *Warm Strangers* both reached the top five of Amazon.com's bestseller list, and she won the 2010 Independent Music Awards' Vox Pop vote for her album *Inland Territory*. She has appeared on The Late Show with David Letterman, NPR's Weekend Edition, CBS's Early Show, and CNN's News Night with Aaron Brown, and has toured with Joan Baez, Brandi Carlile, Duncan Sheik, Madeleine Peyroux, Joan Osborne, Sarah Harmer, Marc Cohn and the Indigo Girls, among others. In addition to her performing and composing career, Vienna is currently studying at the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan, and will graduate with an MBA/MS this May. She is a native of Saratoga, California, and holds a Computer Science degree from Stanford University. viennateng.com

Matt August (Director) directed the Broadway, Los Angeles and Nationally Touring productions of Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical*. This production broke Broadway box office records both in 2006 (Hilton Theatre) and 2007 (St. James Theatre) and continues to tour the country each holiday season. He was recently nominated for the prestigious Helen Hayes Award for outstanding direction for the original musical *Liberty Smith*, which premiered at Ford's Theatre, in Washington DC. Los Angeles Times hailed his production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* for San Diego's Old Globe Theatre as one of the Top Ten Productions of the Year. Other directing credits include the Australian production of *The Full Monty* (Helpmann Award nomination for Best Director); *Sixteen Wounded*, starring Martin Landau, for the Long Wharf Theatre; *Pig Farm*, *Food Chain* and *Time Flies* for the Old Globe Theatre; *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Merry Wives of Windsor* for The Acting Company (off-Broadway and touring productions); and many others. Mr. August directed the world premiere of Tanya Shaffer's play *Baby Taj* at TheatreWorks in 2005. His short film *How to Get to Candybar* is currently touring the film festival circuit. It has played the Manhattan Film Festival, the Monaco Charity Film Festival, and the Cape Fear Independent Film Festival, winning the Best Comedy Award.