

eric schaeffer
 artistic director

sam sweet
 managing director

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Contact: Olivia F. Haas, Director of PR & Marketing
 haaso@signature-theatre.org
 (703) 820-9771 ext. 103

**SIGNATURE THEATRE PRESENTS WASHINGTON PREMIERE
 OF *TEN UNKNOWNNS* BY AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT
 JON ROBIN BAITZ**

- **“Baitz is the American theater’s most fascinating playwright of conscience.” — *Associated Press***
- **Associate Artistic Director Rick DesRochers makes Signature Theatre directing debut**

Arlington, VA — An explosive drama about what happens when art, fame, and integrity collide, *Ten Unknownns* by Jon Robin Baitz receives a Washington premiere at Signature Theatre under the direction of Associate Artistic Director Rick DesRochers. The ongoing war between abstract expressionists and the figurative painters from the 1940s to the present day clash in this battle of artistic wills. Heroin-induced creation and raw sexuality are explored as artists duke it out in a visceral battle of the generations. Artists who have made their reputations in the art world collide with those that have yet to be discovered with equally revolutionary visions. The hard drinking and sexually rapacious likes of Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, and Willem de Kooning, and their successors, Robert Motherwell, Robert Rauschenberg, and Richard Diebenkorn, are the subject of this passionate exploration of the psyche of the artistic temperament. *Ten Unknownns runs March 15 – April 24, 2005, at Signature Theatre. Tickets are on sale now! Call (703) 218-6500 or visit www.signature-theatre.org.*

“I’m thrilled to bring the work of Jon Robin Baitz to our audience for the first time,” stated Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer**. “I think he’s one of America’s most dynamic young playwrights working today. I’m also excited to introduce Washington audiences to Rick, Signature’s new Associate Artistic Director. His sensibilities and personal fascination with visual art and those that create it make him a perfect match for this script.”

In *Ten Unknownns* artist Malcolm Raphaelson, a master of realism, is left behind by a trendy New York art scene intent on the flavor-of-the-month. He quickly fades into obscurity as abstract expressionism makes his style obsolete. Thirty years pass and Raphaelson, living in Mexico, finds that he’s been rediscovered — his early work is now the trendy hit that it never was in his youth. The artist’s spirit is reborn through the renewed hope for success when an art dealer from New York convinces Raphaelson to make his comeback with a solo exhibition and dispatches Judd Sturgess, a rising young painter, to serve as his inspiring assistant. Raphaelson’s discovery of a new female muse throws off a carefully crafted balance, ultimately causing Judd to leave. The ensuing battle of artistic temperament and generational conflict between the young and older painters is the heart of this play’s explosive conclusion.

The concept for *Ten Unknownns* struck playwright **Jon Robin Baitz** years ago as he explains in his introduction to the script, “One day in the early 1980s, I was visiting the Los Angeles County Museum of Art with an acquaintance, an elderly painter... We stopped in front of a small drawing, a

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3806 s. four mile run dr.
 arlington, va 22206

administration
 703.820.9771

box office/tickets.com
 703.218.6500

fax
 703.820.7790

www.signature-theatre.org

Corot, I think. My companion stood in front of it for a very long time, staring sadly, then blankly into space. Eventually he smiled and explained: ‘I used to own this.’ Twenty or so years ago, when he had a little money from selling his own work, he had bought art, and when his own work stopped selling, he had to divest himself of his beloved collection simply in order to live. The sorrow of his story was piercing to me, and I made a note of it at the time in my on-and-off-again journal. As a young writer all of twenty-three, I felt witness to a sobering object lesson in the — possibly very short — life span of an artist’s creative powers, the myth of ownership, and what life is like after you’ve cracked. The message was portentous to me: ‘This will be you — it is not a matter of if, merely when. He is you.’ And indeed, I often go totally mute for long periods. Raphelson’s and Judd’s struggles are mine.”

Baitz’ plays include *The Substance of Fire*, *The End of the Day*, and *Chinese Friends*, which had their premieres at Playwrights Horizons. He is also the author of *The Film Society*, *Three Hotels*, *A Fair Country*, *Mizlansky/Zilinsky*, and an adaptation of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* (starring Annette Bening in Los Angeles, and Kate Burton on Broadway). He’s the recipient of Helen Hayes and Humanitas Awards (for PBS’s “American Playhouse” production of *Three Hotels*, which he directed), as well as *Newsday*’s Oppenheimer Award, N.E.A., American Academy of Arts and Letters and Rockefeller grants and is a 1999 Guggenheim fellow. Screenplays include “The Substance of Fire” (also a Miramax Film) and “People I Know,” and an episode of “The West Wing.” His newest play, *The Paris Letter* will premiere at The Roundabout Theater this spring.

“The desire to direct this play was centered on the inner mechanics of the character Malcolm Raphelson’s creative imagination starting from atrophy and erupting into life again after forty years,” explained director **Rick DesRochers**. “I’m really focused on the workings of Raphelson’s obsessive and reclusive behavior, and in what world he thinks and breathes. Scenic designer Stephanie Nelson and I were concerned with the workings of this man’s mind. His inner maelstrom of creativity, fear, depression, elation, discovery, and obsession was the focus of the production design. And what I wanted from the actors were the emotions of the characters to be worn on the sleeve beginning intensely and escalating to operatic heights. This show should be an exciting ride! As with opera or jazz the fun is in the extreme emotion of the play. That’s why people love soap operas for example, and most ‘reality’ TV shows are melodramas in the end. They all go over the naturalistic edge of people’s day-to-day existence and into that world that we all want to live in vicariously. A *virtual reality*.”

Before coming to Signature, DesRochers served as Literary Director of The Goodman Theatre, and Literary Manager of the Joseph Papp Public Theater/New York Shakespeare Festival, and subsequently as Artistic Director of Boston’s New Theater, Inc. Rick has had the pleasure of working with such playwrights as Craig Lucas, Rinne Groff, Tracey Scott Wilson, Luis Alfaro, Christopher Walken, Nilo Cruz, Alice Tuan, Jordan Harrison, and Suzan-Lori Parks. Rick has directed and produced plays in theatres nationwide, including the Joseph Papp Public Theater, New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Circle Repertory Theatre, and Rude Mechanicals in New York City; as well as The Goodman Theatre, The Playwrights’ Center of Minneapolis, The Boston Center for the Arts, and the Soho Theatre of London. He has taught directing, performance, and playwriting at New York University, New School University, the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, DePaul University, and Roosevelt University. Rick is the author of *Playing Director*, and a new music theater piece, *Faust: A Play for the Music Hall Every Evening and Matinees on Sunday*.

Inspired by the works of the American art icon Jasper Johns and Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, award-winning scenic artist **Stephanie Nelson** creates a set that is a living art installation moving from a landscape frozen in time into one that explodes into a desert vivid with brilliance and light. Some of her past work includes *The Seagull* for Redmoon Theater presented at Steppenwolf, *Salao* also for Redmoon,

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and *Cyrano* for the Court Theatre and Redmoon. Costume designer **Jenn Miller**'s work at Signature Theatre includes *Fallen from Proust*, *One Red Flower*, *Donna Q.*, and the concert version of *Mack and Mabel*. Lighting designer **Jason H. Thompson** recently made his Signature debut with *Fallen from Proust*. His New York credits include *Ghost Opera* and *Pulse Shadows* at Alice-Tully Hall, and *Cooking for Kings* at 59E59 Theatre. Completing the design team are sound designer **Matt Nielson** and with properties by **Ashley Semrick**.

Washington Premiere
TEN UNKNOWNS
 By Jon Robin Baitz

The Cast

Judd Sturgess	Evan Casey
Julia Bryant	Sarah Douglas*
Malcolm Raphelson	Timmy Ray James*
Trevor Fabricant	Nigel Reed*

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

The Creative Team

Director	Rick DesRochers	Sound Designer	Matt Nielson
Set Designer	Stephanie Nelson	Properties	Ashley Semrick
Costume Designer	Jenn Miller	Stage Manager	Colleen Martin
Lighting Designer	Jason H. Thompson		

Performance Schedule

March 15 – April 24, 2005

Press Date: Sunday, March 20

Show Times: Tuesday and Wednesday at 7:30 p.m., Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m., and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. **NOTE:** There is no show on Tuesday, March 22.

Tickets

Tickets are \$25 to \$39 and are available by calling Tickets.com at (800) 955-5566 or (703) 218-6500 and can also be purchased online at www.signature-theatre.org. The Signature Box Office is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and during performances.

Signature Theatre

Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theatre dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals and to the development of new work. Now in its 15th season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 176 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theatre and has been honored with 37 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004 and Outstanding Play in 1999. Signature Theatre is a member of the Theatre Communications Group, The League of Washington Theatres, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, the Arlington Arts Alliance, the Arlington Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Washington Board of Trade.

Directions

Signature Theatre is located just five miles from Washington, DC at 3806 South Four Mile Run Drive in Arlington, VA immediately off I-395 at the Shirlington exit.

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