

ADDRESS  
4200 Campbell Ave.  
Arlington, Virginia  
22206

BOX OFFICE  
703 820 9771  
ADMIN OFFICE  
571 527 1860

FACSIMILE  
703 845 0236  
WEBSITE  
www.signature-theatre.org

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
Eric Schaeffer  
MANAGING DIRECTOR  
Maggie Boland

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For Immediate Release:  
June 24, 2008

Contacts:

Signature Theatre  
Suzanne Stephens, (571) 527-1833 (office) / (202) 438-6234 (mobile)

National Press Representatives:

Adrian Bryan-Brown/Jim Byk/Matt Ross, Boneau/Bryan-Brown, (212) 575-3030

## SIGNATURE THEATRE COMPLETES KANDER & EBB CELEBRATION

### FIRST EVER FESTIVAL DEVOTED TO THE LONGEST SONGWRITING PARTNERSHIP IN MUSICAL THEATER BRINGS IN RAVES AND ATTENDANCE FROM OVER 30,000 PEOPLE FROM 37 STATES AND SIX COUNTRIES

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Arlington, VA – July 24, 2008 – Signature Theatre, under the artistic direction of Eric Schaeffer, yesterday completed the **Kander & Ebb Celebration**, a ground-breaking four-month festival devoted to the works of **John Kander** and **Fred Ebb**, the longest lasting song-writing partnership in the history of the American musical theater. The company offered 187 events ranging from main stage musicals *The Visit*, *The Happy Time*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, to cabaret performances to free film showings. All performances took place in Signature's new complex in the intimacy of the 299-seat MAX and 110-seat ARK Theatres, and attracted 30,559 people from 37 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and six countries including South Africa, England, and Australia.

John Kander stated, "Working at Signature Theatre has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. It's meant so much to me to collaborate with the talented members of the Signature family for the past few months on the Kander & Ebb Celebration. Recreating three of the shows that Fred and I loved so dearly has been pure magic. Producing these shows in a theater that is a fraction of the size of a Broadway house makes the Signature experience unique. The commitment from Eric Schaeffer and his team to produce new and overlooked works requires the most work, but reaps the greatest rewards."

“This celebration has been a highlight in our 18-year history,” said Eric Schaeffer. “The artists and audiences that gathered to salute John and Fred have been inspiring. It has been a major achievement for this community and theater.”

The festival featured the East Coast premiere of *The Visit* staged with the creative talents of eight Tony Award® winners: **John Kander** and the late **Fred Ebb**, book writer **Terrence McNally**, actors **Chita Rivera** and **George Hearn**, director **Frank Galati**, choreographer **Ann Reinking**, and costume designer **Susan Hilferty**. The musical, also starring **Mark Jacoby**, is based on the play of the same name by **Friedrich Dürrenmatt**, adapted by **Maurice Valency**. The first outing of *The Visit* since its premiere in 2001 at Chicago’s Goodman Theater, the production ran May 13 through June 22 in Signature’s MAX Theatre. *Time* magazine stated “The best musical of the year wasn’t to be found at last week’s Tony® awards. It is wrapping up a month-long run in the Washington, D.C. suburbs: a haunting musical adaptation of *The Visit*...” John Simon opined in *Bloomberg.com*, “If Broadway doesn’t, regardless of cost, avail itself of this gem, it will shoot itself in the foot with an obtuseness deserving a shot in the head.”

From April 1 to June 1 in The ARK Theatre, Signature presented a rare production of the 1968 musical *The Happy Time*, featuring **George Dvorsky**, **David Margulies**, and **Michael Minarik**, and directed by **Michael Unger**. Paul Harris of *Variety* called the Signature production, “a fresh and earnest revival...with ultimate intimacy in Signature’s tiny ARK Theatre,” with Michael Kuchwara of the Associated Press commenting that *The Happy Time* was “quite a departure stylistically from *The Visit*. Yet both shows demonstrate the remarkable musical-theatre acumen found in the words and music of John Kander and Fred Ebb.” Michael Toscano of *Theatremania.com* weighed in, “Signature Theatre’s illustrious Kander & Ebb Celebration might end up being most remembered for reviving *The Happy Time* – since 40 years after failing on Broadway, this rarely staged show (with a book by N. Richard Nash) may finally be able to claim its rightful place in the duo’s rich legacy.”

Signature’s first main stage offering of the Celebration was the 1993 Tony Award®-winning *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, starring **Will Chase**, **Natascia Diaz** and **Hunter Foster**. Directed by **Eric Schaeffer**, the production ran from March 11 to April 20 in The MAX Theatre. Paul Harris of *Variety* called it “a most satisfying revival.... Propelled by shrewd performances, the production pays full respect to the tuner’s dark theme and its easily overplayed fantasy moments....Eric Schaeffer has found a winning formula in his sincere treatment of the material....” James Howard of *BroadwayWorld.com* stated, “One can’t imagine a much better production of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* than this one. The production really shows that this is a timeless work, dated in no way and as fresh and important as when it debuted. I imagine Mr. Kander is thrilled and that the late Mr. Ebb is looking down on Signature Theatre and smiling proudly.”

For the Kander & Ebb Celebration, Signature also offered two popular cabaret series. Tony®-nominated artist **Karen Akers** brought her critically-acclaimed cabaret show *First You Dream: The Songs of Kander & Ebb* for eight performances from March 11 to 16. Signature also presented six performances of *Kander & Ebb Overtures* from June 4 to 7 featuring graduates from Signature’s Overtures Musical Theater Institute in a special showcase of Kander and Ebb’s most popular songs. Other events included the **Bowen McCauley Dance** company’s world premiere of pieces set to Kander & Ebb (June 12 to 15), a free Kander & Ebb film series (March 31, April 14, June 2, and June

23), **The Kander & Ebb Celebration Gala** (May 17) and ***Colored Lights***, a special exhibition of Kander & Ebb memorabilia (March 11 to June 23).

The Kander & Ebb Celebration was made possible by the HRH Foundation and Gil and Jaylee Mead. *The Visit* was supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was sponsored by The Bernard Family Foundation.

## PHOTOS

Photos from the Kander & Ebb Celebration are available to download at [http://www.signature-theatre.org/photo\\_downloads.htm](http://www.signature-theatre.org/photo_downloads.htm). [Information for press only – do not publish link].

## ABOUT SIGNATURE

Under the leadership of Co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theater company dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. To date, Signature has presented over 25 world premiere productions and is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with intimate playing spaces. In addition to John Kander and Fred Ebb, Signature has been a home to such theater luminaries as Cameron Mackintosh, Terrence McNally, and the company's signature Stephen Sondheim. Signature has been nominated for 234 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater and has been honored with 59 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005, and 2006, and Outstanding Play in 1999.

### **Contact Info**

Ticketmaster (703) 573-SEAT (7328)  
Signature Administration (571) 527-1860  
Signature Theatre  
4200 Campbell Avenue  
Arlington, VA 22206  
[www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org)

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