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SIGNATURE THEATRE ANNOUNCES ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

Arlington, VA – Signature Theatre’s Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer today announced Signature’s 20th anniversary season, saluting the two decades that have led the company to its position as one of the nation’s leading forces in musical theater. The company will present a world premiere musical through its innovative American Musical Voices Project; a masterpiece by the composer for which the company is renowned, Stephen Sondheim; the Washington premiere of a recent Broadway hit; and the reinvention of a classic musical, supporting Signature’s “much-deserved reputation for excellence in revisionist musical theater” (*Chicago Tribune*). The world premiere is Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Sycamore Trees* directed by Tina Landau (May 18 – June 20, 2010); the Sondheim masterpiece is *Sweeney Todd* (Feb. 9 – April 4, 2010); the Washington premiere is the Broadway hit *[title of show]* (March 30 – June 20, 2010); and the reinvented classic musical is Kern and Hammerstein’s classic *Show Boat* (Nov. 10, 2009 – Jan. 17, 2010) re-envisioned in a bold new production, with a new overture and orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick.

Two acclaimed artists return to Signature: Tony Award®-nominee Emily Skinner stars in the Broadway hit show about Mae West, *Dirty Blonde* (Aug. 11 – Oct. 4, 2009), and Helen Hayes Award-winner Andrew Long stars in *I Am My Own Wife*, (Jan. 12 – March 7, 2010) winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award® for Best Play. To put even more fizz into the 20th anniversary, Signature’s popular cabaret evenings throughout the season will feature highlights of the Theater’s 20 years of musical theater offerings.

Eric Schaeffer stated, “It’s going to be a special year at Signature Theatre as we celebrate our 20th anniversary. Looking back to the early days in the Arlington Arts Incubator program and the Garage through the present, we’ve had an amazing group of artists over the past 20 years contribute to this milestone in our history. This season will be no different and promises to be a real celebration: a world premiere, a Sondheim musical, a Washington premiere, and a classic American musical in Signature style. It’s a season of greats – legendary composers and writers Stephen Sondheim, Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II, orchestrator Jonathan Tunick, and Steppenwolf Ensemble Member director, Tina Landau. Tony Award®-nominee Emily Skinner and Helen Hayes Award-winner Andrew Long will grace our stage as well as many other Signature favorites. It promises to be one great party all year long!”

The 20th Anniversary season runs from August 11, 2009 through June 27, 2010. Mainstage season subscriptions are now on sale and range in price from \$141 to \$486. For more information call the Signature Box Office at (703) 820-9771 or visit www.signature-theatre.org.

Signature Theatre's 20th Season

**Tony Award®-Nominee Emily Skinner is Mae West in
DIRTY BLONDE
A Play with Music by Claudia Shear
Directed by Signature Artistic Associate Jeremy Skidmore
August 11 – October 4, 2009 in the ARK**

A funny, bawdy New York hit penned by Claudia Shear, Signature's production of *Dirty Blonde* will star Tony Award®-nominee and Signature favorite Emily Skinner in the two roles she was born to play – cinematic legend Mae West and West's most fixated fan Jo. Skinner says, "I have long been an admirer of both West and Shear, and can't wait to take a bite out of this juicy, funny, moving material!" *Dirty Blonde* is a "smart, tough, and tenderhearted comedy" (*New York Times*), revealing the individual behind Mae West's sexy celluloid façade and examining why lost souls like Jo are so mesmerized by the provocative sex goddess. Nominated for five Tony Awards® in 2000, *Dirty Blonde* will be directed by Signature Artistic Associate Jeremy Skidmore.

Reinventing the classic American musical
SHOW BOAT
Music by Jerome Kern
Book and Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II
Based on the novel *Show Boat* by Edna Ferber
Directed by Eric Schaeffer
November 10, 2009 – January 17, 2010 in the MAX

Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer reinvents the classic 1927 American musical *Show Boat* in an intimate new staging for our times. The production will feature new orchestrations — and a new overture — by the renowned Jonathan Tunick, winner of all four show business awards: the Tony®, Oscar, Emmy, and Grammy. Spanning the years 1880 to 1927, this lyrical masterpiece concerns the lives, loves, and heartbreaks of three generations of show folk on the Mississippi. *Show Boat* is a sweeping tale of enduring love and devastating hatred, illuminating through unforgettable music the cruelty of prejudice — and the beauty of romance. Among its many beloved songs are *Make Believe*, *Bill*, *Can't Help Lovin' 'Dat Man*, and *Ol' Man River*. Ted Chapin, President of the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization, stated, "Signature has explored the repertoire of the modern musical theater with such expertise that mounting *Show Boat* — the granddaddy of them all — is a perfect fit, especially for an anniversary year. The Hammerstein/Kern/Ferber classic

was remarkable in its time, and the Signature audiences will see that its boldness, romance, courage, and sheer beauty have lost none of their impact.”

Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize and the 2004 Tony Award® for Best Play

I AM MY OWN WIFE

By Doug Wright

Starring Helen Hayes Award-Winner Andrew Long

Directed by Alan Paul

January 12 – March 7, 2010 in the ARK

Inspired by interviews conducted by the playwright over several years, *I Am My Own Wife* tells the fascinating real-life story of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a German transvestite who managed to survive both Nazi rule and the repressive East German Communist regime. Von Mahlsdorf created a safe-space in the bowels of her antiques museum for East Berlin’s “undesirables” – homosexuals, cross-dressers, and prostitutes. But in order to survive, she sacrificed her ideals, becoming an informer for the East German secret police, the Stasi. In this “brilliant” (*New Yorker*) one-man show, the award-winning Andrew Long (*My Fair Lady* and *Saving Aimee*) portrays Charlotte’s complexity – a non-conformist shrouded in an image of conformity, a protector of minorities who ultimately becomes their betrayer. *I Am My Own Wife* was the winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize and the 2004 Tony Award® for Best Play.

A new environmental production

SWEENEY TODD

Music and Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by Hugh Wheeler

Based on the play by Christopher Bond

Directed by Eric Schaeffer

February 9 – April 4, 2010 in the MAX

The first musical ever presented at Signature, *Sweeney Todd* gets a brand new environmental staging in the MAX Theatre as part of the 20th anniversary season. “When trying to pick which Sondheim musical would be in our 20th Anniversary season, I had many titles floating in my head – but I thought what was best was rediscovering the musical that started it all for us. It had to be *Sweeney Todd* and I’m thrilled to bring Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett to our new Theatre,” stated Eric Schaeffer. Since that first production, Sondheim has become Signature’s signature composer. And *Sweeney Todd* is Sondheim’s masterpiece – with all its gothic gore, lush songs, and romantic melodrama. It’s a grand musical that has all the stuff of a classic horror story – betrayal, revenge, madness, and murder. The “meat” pies will be baking and the blood will be flowing in this thriller musical comedy featuring a celebrated cast of Signature Theatre favorites.

The Washington Premiere of

[title of show]

Music and Lyrics by Jeff Bowen

Book by Hunter Bell
Directed by Matthew Gardiner
March 30 – June 20, 2010 in the ARK

“Hilarious! A fresh new musical worth cheering!” – *The New York Times*

[title of show] puts the audience right in the middle of the creative process — dizzy, unpredictable, and uproarious. When faced with a festival’s submission deadline for their new musical, Jeff and Hunter can’t decide what to write about. With friends Susan and Heidi (and Larry on the piano), they come up with a solution — write about what to write about. Helen Hayes Award-winner Matthew Gardiner directs this love letter to the musical theater — a uniquely American art form — and to the joy of collaboration.

A World Premiere
American Musical Voices Project: Part Two
SYCAMORE TREES
By Ricky Ian Gordon
Directed by Tina Landau
May 18 – June 20, 2010 in the MAX
Sponsored by The Shen Family Foundation

Composer Ricky Ian Gordon is the second recipient of the American Musical Voices Project Award to present a new work of musical theater on Signature’s stage. *Sycamore Trees* is the moving story of his family’s struggles and their reliance on each other through good and bad. The composer says, “When my father came home from World War II in 1945, my family lived in a crowded tenement in the Bronx, poor and with bed bugs. Then my parents got the idea to move to the suburbs where the dream of life flowering in a clean and spacious environment promised to be the answer. It wasn’t. This is the story of a family and what happened to them ... and music is its heartbeat and inner life.” Gordon is the composer of the acclaimed *The Grapes of Wrath*, hailed for its merging of Broadway and opera in “sly... vintage musical Americana.” Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble Member and acclaimed Chicago director Tina Landau (*Iphigenia 2.0*, *The Trojan Women*) comes to the Washington area to direct this world premiere musical.

CABARET: Signature’s 20 years of musical theater are saluted in a series of four cabaret evenings throughout the season.

Signature Sings: 1989-1994
Performances October 13 – 18, 2009
Select songs performed from the musical productions from 1989-1994 including *Sweeney Todd*, *Assassins*, *Company*, *Wings – The Musical*, and *Into the Woods*.

Signature Sings: 1995-1999
Performances November 17 – 22, 2009
Select songs performed from the musical productions from 1995-1999 including *First Lady Suite*, *Cabaret*, *A Grand Night for Singing*, *Passion*, *The Rink*, *Sunday in the*

Park With George, Working, The Fix, A Little Night Music, Over and Over, and Tell Me on a Sunday.

Signature Sings: 2000-2004

Performances March 9 – 14, 2010

Select songs performed from the musical productions from 2000-2004 including *Floyd Collins, Gypsy, Putting it Together, Grand Hotel, Hedwig & the Angry Inch, 110 in the Shade, Follies, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Allegro, Elegies: A Song Cycle, and The Highest Yellow.*

Signature Sings: 2005-2009

June 22 – 27, 2010

Select songs performed from the musical productions from 2005-2009 including *Pacific Overtures, Urinetown, Nevermore, My Fair Lady, Saving Aimee, The Witches of Eastwick, Merrily We Roll Along, Glory Days, Kiss of the Spider Woman, The Happy Time, The Visit, Ace, Les Misérables, and Giant.*

CHRISTMAS CABARET

December 15 – 20, 2009

Following the past seasons' smash Christmas cabarets, this year Signature offers audiences the chance to enjoy the seasonal favorites with this all-male holiday cabaret – *Swingin' Santas.*

SIGNATURE'S ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE

August 8, 2009

Signature's 2009-2010 season kicks off on August 8 with the annual **FREE Open House**. Audiences can enjoy performances and classes followed by a grand finale Broadway-style concert on the Plaza. It's a perfect event for the whole family! Noon to 9 pm with new performances beginning every 15 minutes on the five stages throughout the building.

ABOUT SIGNATURE

Under the leadership of co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature 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 the finest talent from the DC metropolitan area and New York, Signature has been a home to such theater luminaries as John Kander and Fred Ebb, Cameron Mackintosh, Terrence McNally, and the company's signature, Stephen Sondheim. Signature has been nominated for 276 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.

Signature Theatre is supported by a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Contact Information

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