

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**November 4, 2005**

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**SIGNATURE THEATRE PRESENTS WASHINGTON PREMIERE  
OF *YEMAYA'S BELLY* BY AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT  
QUIARA ALEGRÍA HUDES**

**“Her plays abound in an exuberant, richly imaginative theatricality that’s enchanting.”** — *The Oregonian*

Arlington, VA — Feel the heat and infectious vibrations of the Caribbean in Quiara Alegría Hudes coming-of-age story about a boy, a bottle of Coke, and a boat that sails toward the Promised Land. Poetry, songs and movement drawn from Santería — the religion in which Yemaya rules over the seas — create a landscape of magical realism moving the characters and audience effortlessly between the real and surreal. *Yemaya’s Belly* is a tapestry that is both wonderfully simple and highly complex — audiences will delight in the beautiful language and striking visual style of this award-winning new play. *Yemaya’s Belly* runs **November 8 – December 18, 2005, at Signature Theatre. Tickets are on sale now! Call (800) 955-5566 or visit [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org).**

eric schaeffer  
artistic director

sam sweet  
managing director

“I’m excited to introduce Washington audiences to Quiara’s work,” says Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer**. “She is a fresh voice in American theater and definitely one to watch. Her writing is so lyrical — it’s pure poetry.”

**Quiara Alegría Hudes**, a West Philadelphia native, has family roots in Puerto Rico. Her work is self-described as “feminist, Latina, poetic, humanist, gritty and alive, pulsing with optimism in difficult circumstances.” Hudes interweaves heightened drama with real human stories, and infuses her scripts with ritual. “Rituals are the moments where words would only get in the way,” she explains. “They are about seeing one body and one object together, in a time of heightened possession. They are about the moment when a person falls in love with the material world, the spiritual joys and pains that can be unexpectedly discovered in everyday objects.”

*Yemaya’s Belly* is the recipient of the Clauder Prize (best play by a New England playwright), the Paula Vogel Award in Playwriting, and the Kennedy Center ACTF Latina Playwriting Award. Receiving its third national production at Signature Theatre, *Yemaya’s Belly* premiered at Portland Stage Company following the production of an early draft at Miracle Theatre.

*Yemaya’s Belly* was partly inspired by the stories Hudes’ father would tell his little girl. One of her favorites was when he held his first refrigerated Coke. The bottle was so cold it “burned” his hands in a way he had never experienced. Born in a rural area of Puerto Rico, her father immigrated to the United States to live out the American Dream as a successful businessman. To Hudes, *Yemaya’s Belly* is her meditation on leaving home — why we leave, what we seek, what part of home stays with us forever, and what we lose once we journey into the larger world.

Additional plays include *Adventures of Barrio Grrrr!*, *The Board Room*, *Holy Broth*, and her most recent work, *Elliot (A Soldier’s Fugue)*. Her long list of honors include The International Womens’ Playwriting Festival (first prize), The Weston Prize (best play by a Brown University graduate

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student), The Lucille Lortel Playwriting Fellowship, The Page 73 Playwriting Fellowship, and the 2005 Arch & Bruce Brown Prize in Fiction (for her story *Stargazers*). Hudes received her first playwriting award in tenth grade after winning the Philadelphia Young Playwrights Festival. She holds a B.A. in music composition from Yale College and an M.F.A. in playwriting from Brown University. She is a resident playwright at New Dramatists and part of the playwrights lab at New York's Women's Project and Productions.

### **DIRECTION AND DESIGN**

Director **Rick DesRochers** originally read an early draft of *Yemaya's Belly* while he was working as the Literary Director at the Joseph Papp Public Theater. He immediately fell in love with the story and lyrical language. "It's amazing to me how my relationship with this script has come full circle almost two years later."

Signature Theatre's Associate Artistic Director, DesRochers was previously the Literary Director at The Goodman Theatre. He has directed productions at such illustrious venues as the Joseph Papp Public Theater, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Circle Repertory Theatre/Circle East, The Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis, The Goodman Theatre, The Boston Center for the Arts, Chicago Dramatists, and The Soho Theatre of London. DesRochers has worked with a broad range of playwrights such as Luis Alfaro, Janet Allard, Nilo Cruz, Rinne Groff, Jordan Harrison, Craig Lucas, Suzan-Lori Parks, Alice Tuan, Christopher Walken, Tracey Scott Wilson, Karen Zacarias, and composers Adam Guettel, David Maddox, Jim Tullio, and Joe Tech Huppert.

Set Designer **Stephanie Nelson** has the unique challenge of creating a world that allows the audience to move seamlessly with the characters from the top of a mountain to a bustling city to the ocean floor. Some of her past work has been seen at Steppenwolf, Indiana Repertory, Red Orchid Theater, and Redmoon Theatre Co. Composer/Sound Designer **David Maddox** is composing original music and songs along with instrumental sound cues using traditional Cuban instruments. A Signature Theatre Artistic Associate, Maddox has written musicals with Mary Hall Surface including *Sing Down the Moon*, *Perseus Bayou*, and *Mississippi Pinocchio*. 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**'s varied credits include *Fallen from Proust* at Signature and *Ghost Opera* and *Pulse Shadows* at Lincoln Center.

### **CAST**

*Yemaya's Belly* follows the journey of 12-year old Jesus, played by **Jose Aranda**, a member of the Enact Company in New York City and a former Kenan/Kennedy Center Fellow. **Saskia de Vries** plays the deity Yemaya and the feisty young woman Maya who joins Jesus' journey. De Vries has been seen locally at Arena Stage in *Agamemnon and His Daughters*, Ford's Theatre in *Christmas Carol*, and Folger Theatre in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Comedy of Error*. **Clifton Alphonzo Duncan** returns to Signature as Jelin, Jesus' uncle. Previously seen in *One Red Flower* at Signature, Duncan has also appeared at The Shakespeare Theatre in *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Playing Tico, the coconut stand owner, is **Joseph W. Lane** who has appeared at The Shakespeare Theatre in *The Little Foxes*, and at Arena Stage in *I Am A Man* and *Anthems: Culture Clash Across the District*. **Tuyet Thi Pham** joins the cast as Jesus' Mami and the grocery owner, Lila. Pham was first seen on DC's stages in *South Pacific* at Arena Stage, followed by *An American Daughter*.

Washington Premiere  
**YEMAYA'S BELLY**  
 By Quiara Alegría Hudes

**Cast**

Jesus/Mulo      **Jose Aranda**  
 Maya/Yemaya   **Saskia de Vries**  
 Jelin            **Clifton Alphonzo Duncan**  
 Tico              **Joseph W. Lane**  
 Lila/Mami      **Tuyet Thi Pham**

**Direction & Design**

Director                      **Rick DesRochers**  
 Set Designer                **Stephanie Nelson**  
 Costume Designer         **Jenn Miller**  
 Lighting Designer         **Jason H. Thompson**  
 Composer/Sound Designer **David Maddox**

**Performance Schedule**

**November 8 – December 18, 2005**

*Press Date:*      Sunday, November 13

*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 are no shows on Tuesday, March 22 and Thursday, November 24. Added show on Monday, November 21 at 8:00 p.m.*

**Tickets**

Tickets are \$29 to \$49 and are available by calling Tickets.com at (800) 955-5566 or online at [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org). The Signature Box Office is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and during performances. Discounts are available for students, seniors (60+), military and groups of ten or more. 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 theater dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals and developing new work. Now in its 16<sup>th</sup> season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 191 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theater and has been honored with 42 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005 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.

**Contact Info**

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