

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SIGNATURE PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF *THE HIGHEST YELLOW*, A NEW MUSICAL BY 5-TIME TONY NOMINEE MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA AND AWARD-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT JOHN STRAND.**

- **Cast features Broadway stars Jason Danieleley, Marc Kudisch and Judy Kuhn**
- ***The Highest Yellow* is the first commissioned musical in Signature’s history**

Arlington, VA — Signature Theatre presents the highly anticipated world premiere of *The Highest Yellow* — an exciting collaboration between five-time Tony-nominated composer/lyricist **Michael John LaChiusa**, Charles MacArthur Award-winning playwright **John Strand** and three-time Helen Hayes Award-winning director **Eric Schaeffer**. In December 1888, a young French intern in Arles admitted a patient suffering from delirium and a self-inflicted knife wound. Dr. Felix Rey was convinced he could cure this unusual patient, a Dutch painter named Vincent van Gogh, of his “nervous condition.” Set to an intensely beautiful score, this is the story of a provincial doctor’s discovery of art and prostitution, and his unexpected encounter with madness versus genius, love versus obsession, and what we ultimately give up in order to hold on to what we find most precious. ***The Highest Yellow* runs October 26 – December 12, 2004, at Signature Theatre. Tickets are on sale now! Call (703) 218-6500 or visit [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org).**

“The idea for this musical was sparked about five years ago,” explained Director **ERIC SCHAEFFER**. “I read this lovely children’s book about a little boy who befriends a ‘mad’ painter in his village — a man who traveled throughout the countryside of Arles, France painting sunflowers. Signature had recently commissioned playwright John Strand to write *The Diaries* and I first approached him with the idea for a production about van Gogh. I had also kept in touch with Michael John LaChiusa ever since Signature presented one of the first post-New York productions of *First Lady Suite*. He and I always talked about wanting to work on another project together. And now here we are! The three of us collaborating together everyday in rehearsal about to mount the world premiere of the first musical commissioned by Signature Theatre starring three of Broadway’s most talented performers. It’s a director’s dream!”

“Eric had an idea about this story about Vincent van Gogh that intrigued him,” recalled Composer/Lyricist/ Librettist **MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA**. “When he and John Strand first proposed the project to me to write the music, I said ‘Oh no, I don’t want to do a musical about a painter...it’s been done.’ Although van Gogh’s story is quite fascinating and quite beautiful, I thought there was something wrong with singing painters. But when they first presented me with the script for the first act, I thought it was beautiful. I wrote down the score in two weeks. The second act was not so easy. I couldn’t write it. So it just sat there for five years. I didn’t touch it. And some of my other work, *Marie Christine*, *The Wild Party*, and the opera *Lovers and Friends*, really demanded my attention. Eric and John were so patient with me. John and I later rewrote the second act and got it to a place where we wanted it to be. I then wrote the rest of the score in

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two weeks. So, it actually took only one month to write the entire score, but five years to get the thing to the right place. Sometimes it comes real easy and sometimes it comes real hard.”

**MICHAEL JOHN LACHIUSA** premiered his new musical, *R shomon*, this summer at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. During the 1999-2000 season LaChiusa had a very busy season on Broadway with productions of *The Wild Party* and *Marie Christine*, receiving Tony nominations for Best Score and Best Book (with George C. Wolfe on *The Wild Party*) for each show. Other works include *Little Fish*, *Hello Again*, *First Lady Suite*, *Break/Agnes/Eulogy for Mister Hamm*, and *Chronicle for a Death Foretold* for which he received a Tony nomination for Best Book (with Graciela Daniele and Jim Lewis) in 1996. He was the 1998-1999 Composer-in-Residence at the Lyric Opera of Chicago where his piece *Lovers and Friends: Chautauqua Variations* had its world premiere in June 2001. Mr. LaChiusa is an Obie Award-winner (*Hello Again* and *First Lady Suite*) as well as the recipient of the Gilman-Gonzalez-Falla Musical Theatre Award. Recordings include the 2001 Grammy-nominated Original Cast Album of *The Wild Party* (Decca Broadway), *Marie Christine* (RCA Victor), *Hello Again* (RCA Victor), and *First Lady Suite* (PS Classics) and his songs are featured on Audra McDonald’s best-selling albums *Way Back To Paradise* and *Happy Songs* (Nonesuch).

For playwright **JOHN STRAND** *The Highest Yellow* is his first collaboration on a musical. “I remember so vividly the day that Eric approached me with his idea. We were sitting in a park on a bench and the sunlight was bouncing off the leaves of the trees in such an amazing way. My first reaction was exactly the same as Michael John’s,” reflected Strand. “I made Eric explain to me how this was going to be different than Sondheim’s *Sunday in the Park with George*. Eric said he had no interest in doing that theme again – he had already directed that show. What he envisioned was not a story about the career of van Gogh as a painter, but an exploration – a spiritual journey really – into the lives of those he touched and about that creative, but dangerous place in our minds that teeters between genius and madness.”

**JOHN STRAND’S** plays include *Lovers and Executioners*, winner of the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play (1999); *The Diaries*, commissioned by Signature Theatre and nominated for the MacArthur Award (2002); and *Tom Walker*, commissioned by Arena Stage (2002). Among his other plays are *Otabenga*, directed by Michael Kahn at Signature Theatre, nominated for the MacArthur Award; *The Miser*, an adaptation of the Molière play set in Regan-era America, Arena Stage; *Three Nights in Tehran*, a comedy about the Iran-Contra affair, Signature Theatre; *The Cockburn Rituals*, Woolly Mammoth Theatre. John has received multiple playwriting commissions from South Coast Repertory, Arena Stage and Signature Theatre. He recently completed *Lincolnesque*, a play about contemporary American politics for South Coast Repertory and *Charity Royal*, an adaptation of the Edith Wharton novel *Summer* for Arena Stage. His adaptation of Alfred de Musset’s 1834 French classic *Lorenzaccio* will premiere at The Shakespeare Theatre in January 2005, directed by Michael Kahn. John spent ten years in Paris, where he worked as a journalist and drama critic, writing in English and French. While there, he was director of New York University’s Experimental Theater Wing in Paris. Dramatic Publishing, Inc., Chicago, publishes his plays. He currently lives in Maryland with his wife and four children.

Leading the cast are three of Broadway’s hottest stars, **JASON DANIELEY**, **MARC KUDISCH** and **JUDY KUHN**.

**JASON DANIELEY** plays Dr. Felix Rey, a man whose life view is completely altered by his encounter with van Gogh. Most recently, Danieleley performed with wife Marin Mazzie at the Pasadena Playhouse in the updated version of *110 in the Shade*, which originally premiered at Signature Theatre in 2003. Danieleley and Mazzie also appeared together in *Brigadoon* at Reprise LA. Broadway credits include *Candide* in *Candide* (Theatre World Award, Drama League Award, Drama Desk Nomination) and *The Full Monty* (also in the London cast). Off-Broadway Danieleley has been seen in *The Trojan Women* by Charles Mee, *Dream True* by

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Ricky Ian Gordon, and *Floyd Collins* by Adam Guettel. Danieleley and Mazzie created and performed *Opposite You* for *American Songbook Series* at Lincoln Center, Joe's Pub and the Cinegrill in LA.

Tony-nominee **MARC KUDISCH** stars as Vincent van Gogh. Kudisch's Broadway roles include The Proprietor in *Assassins* (Drama Desk Nomination, cast album), Carl Magnus in *A Little Night Music* (NYC and LA Opera), Trevor Graydon in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* (Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Circle Nominations, cast album), Jeff Moss in *Bells are Ringing* (cast album), Jackie in *The Wild Party* (cast album), Chauvelin in *The Scarlet Pimpernel 3.0*, George Kitteridge in *High Society* (cast album), Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, and Reuben in *Joseph...Dreamcoat* (cast album). Off-Broadway he appeared as Tom in *The Thing about Men*, Mike Robinson in *No Strings* (Encores!), *Tamara – The Living Movie*, and *Quiet on the Set*. Kudisch starred as Conrad Birdie in *Bye Bye Birdie* in the national tour with Tommy Tune and reprised the role for the ABC-TV/Hallmark production with Jason Alexander and Vanessa Williams (cast album).

**JUDY KUHN** portrays the lead female role of Rachel, the prostitute to whom van Gogh presented his ear as a token of his affection. Kuhn has been nominated for three Tony Awards and three Drama Desk Awards for her performances on Broadway in such shows as The Roundabout's hit revival of *She Loves Me*, *Chess*, *Les Miserables*, and *Rags*. Also on Broadway she appeared in Richard Nelson's play *Two Shakespearean Actors* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Alan Menken & Tim Rice's King David*, and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (NYSF). Other roles include Fosca in the critically-acclaimed production of *Passion* (directed by Eric Schaeffer) at the Kennedy Center's Sondheim Celebration, the U.S. premiere of *Sunset Boulevard* in Los Angeles, *Eli's Comin'* (Vineyard Theatre/Obie Award), the title role in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Steppenwolf Theatre Co./Jeff Award Nomination), *As Thousand's Cheer* (Drama Dept.), *Dream True* (Vineyard Theatre), *Strike Up the Band* (Encores!), *The Glass Menagerie* (MacArter Theatre), *Martin Guerre* (Hartford Stage), and Martha Clarke's *Endangered Species* (BAM). She also starred in London's West End in *Metropolis* for which she received a Laurence Olivier Award Nomination. Judy sang the title role in Disney's *Pocahontas* as well as the in the sequel *Pocahontas: Journey to a New World*.

The supporting cast includes Signature favorites **DONNA MIGLIACCIO, STEPHEN GREGORY SMITH, R. SCOTT THOMPSON** and **HARRY A. WINTER**.

*The Highest Yellow* is made possible in part by the Shen Family Foundation.

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World Premiere

### ***THE HIGHEST YELLOW***

Music and Lyrics by Michael John LaChiusa

Book by John Strand

#### **The Cast**

##### **Starring**

Dr. Felix Rey

**Jason Danieleley**

Vincent van Gogh

**Marc Kudisch**

Rachel

**Judy Kuhn**

##### **With**

Patient 1/Nurse/Madame

**Donna Migliaccio**

Patient 2/Dr. Barrault

**Stephen Gregory Smith**

Patient 3/Waiter

**R. Scott Thompson**

Dr. Urpar

**Harry A. Winter**

#### **The Creative Team**

Director

**Eric Schaeffer**

Lighting Designer

**Daniel MacLean Wagner**

Music Director

**Jon Kalbfleisch**

Sound Designer

**Tony Angelini**

Orchestrations

**Jonathan Tunick**

Properties

**Elsie Jones**

Set Designer

**Walt Spangler**

Asst Director

**Lee Armitage**

Costume Designer

**Anne Kennedy**

Asst Music Director

**Jenny Cartney**

Stage Manager

**Ronnie Gunderson**

**Performance Schedule****October 26 – December 12, 2004***Press Date:* Sunday, November 7, 2004*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:** No shows on Tuesday, November 9 or Thursday, November 25. A special Thanksgiving Holiday performance is scheduled for Monday, November 22.**Tickets**

Tickets are \$30 to \$49 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](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.

**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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

**Contact Info**

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