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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**December 10, 2005**

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**SIGNATURE THEATRE PRESENTS WORLD PREMIERE OF  
*NEVERMORE*, A NEW MUSICAL BASED ON THE WRITINGS OF  
EDGAR ALLAN POE.**

- **2005 Helen Hayes Award-winner Eric Schaeffer directs his final production in Signature's current theatre**
- **Cast features Broadway stars Daniel Cooney, Florence Lacey and Jacquelyn Piro**
- **Tony®, Grammy®, Oscar® and Emmy®-winner Jonathan Tunick creates orchestrations**

**“Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music without the idea is simply music; the idea without the music is prose...”**

—Edgar Allan Poe

Arlington, VA — Signature Theatre takes audiences on a dark, mysterious journey into the life of American poet Edgar Allan Poe. The imaginative world premiere musical *Nevermore* uses Poe's poetry and short stories as its base and his shifting obsessions with the women in his life as its catalyst. With hauntingly beautiful melodies, *Nevermore* breathes new life into Poe's work and explores a twisted true-life tale as bizarre as his classic stories of the macabre. **Eric Schaeffer**, winner of the 2005 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Director, Resident Musical (*Allegro*), helms the project — directing his final musical in Signature's current space. ***Nevermore* runs January 10 – February 26, 2006 at Signature Theatre. Tickets are on sale now at Tickets.com (800) 955-5566 or online at www.signature-theatre.org.**

“*Nevermore* is a fitting show to be my last in the garage,” says Signature Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer**. “It's a bold, exciting new musical that breaks boundaries, challenges audiences, and brings Poe's passion and obsessions to life in a most extraordinary way. What's particularly exciting about *Nevermore* is that it breaks many musical theatre conventions. It doesn't have a linear story. I like to describe the show as a cross between an American musical and Cirque de Soleil. The characters come to life and interact in very alarming ways — as people, voices, ghosts, and demons. *Nevermore* is a journey of death flashing before Poe's eyes. It's a montage, a whirlwind, a dream, a life and a nightmare all in one. But first, and always first, it's theatre.”

A Signature Theatre commission, *Nevermore* has been in development for two years. Composer **Matt Conner** never intended to write a musical about Edgar Allan Poe when he picked up a copy of Poe's poems from a bookstore discount bin. As an exercise, Conner would sit down at his piano and try to put the poetry to music. “The works of Edgar Allan Poe are more universal than one might suspect at first glance,” said Conner. “His words are filled with themes of love, hate, hope, horror, passion, and fear. As a composer, it was particularly his poetry filled with meter, rhythm, and dramatic sounds that inspired me. Even Poe, critically panned in his day for his ‘musicality’ as a writer, felt that true beauty was the combination of music and poetry. Thus was born the collaboration of *Nevermore* with a lyricist almost two hundred years old.”

— MORE —

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Conner, a graduate of the prestigious Conservatory of Music at Shenandoah University, describes the music as “a gospel inspired sound with a mixture of pop that at times is on the verge of rock. It lifts the listener above and beyond the lyrics to an ethereal journey filled with colors, textures, and emotions. The elements of this piece reinvent the traditional musical form and rejuvenate one of America’s greatest authors.”

*Nevermore* begins at the end of Poe’s life — an end that is cloaked in mystery worthy of the master of horror and the shadowy unknown. Poe was found semiconscious in Baltimore on October 3, 1849. Taken to a hospital, he passed from delirium to unconsciousness, but never fully recovered to tell how he had arrived in such a condition. Poe’s delirious mind is a matter of much speculation and debate — an invitation to dramatic exploration for the creators of *Nevermore*. All the songs in the show are Poe’s poems or short stories put to music, but, the show is not a historical retrospective. According to playwright **Grace Barnes** (*Zander’s Boat*, American premiere at Signature) she was “resolved that *Nevermore* not become purely a biographical retelling of Poe’s life, but more a response to the poetry, tenuously linked by his relationships with a number of women who had a major influence on his life. And therefore his writing.” According to Barnes, “When I reread his poems, I was struck by the amazing imagery driving them, and the fact that no two readers would interpret them in the same way. But I make no claim to be a Poe expert. I approached *Nevermore* with the simple desire to make the words of Edgar Allen Poe mean more than just a name — or a quote — to audience members. To bring him to life and to explore the relationships which resulted in the poetry that remains with us today.”

Matt Conner and Grace Barnes have been commissioned by Signature Theatre to write a musical about the Underground Railroad. “Matt and Grace have turned out to be such fantastic collaborators that I almost immediately asked them to develop another new musical together,” said Eric Schaeffer. The first act of this new project will receive a public reading at Signature’s “Naked Nights” New Play Festival tentatively scheduled for fall 2006.

### CAST

All the characters, except for one, are historical figures from Poe’s life. **Daniel Cooney**, starring as Edgar, makes his Signature Theatre debut. A graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Cooney appeared in *Les Misérables* on Broadway as well as the first national tour, in *Company* at the Kennedy Center, and the world premiere of Kathie Lee Gifford’s musical *Under the Bridge* directed Off-Broadway by Eric Schaeffer. Broadway legend **Florence Lacey** returns to the Signature stage as Poe’s Mother. Lacey was seen at the Kennedy Center in *Sunday in the Park with George* directed by Schaeffer — *Nevermore* marks their eighth project together. Her Signature credits include *The Rhythm Club*, *The Gospel According to Fishman*, *Follies* and *One Red Flower*. Broadway appearances include the lead role in *Evita*; *Hello, Dolly!* (Irene Malloy); *Les Misérables* (Fantine); *The Grand Tour* and *An Evening with Jerry Herman*. **Channez McQuay** plays Muddy, Poe’s aunt and mother-in-law. She was recently seen at Signature in *Pacific Overtures* and returns in fall 2006 for Schaeffer’s production of *Into the Woods*. Playing the only fictional, composite role in the show is **Amy McWilliams** appearing as the Whore. McWilliams has been seen at Signature in *Urinetown*, *Zander’s Boat*, *In the Garden*, *The Fix* and *Working*. At the Kennedy Center she has been in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Sunday in the Park with George* and *Merrily We Roll Along*. Appearing as Elmira, Poe’s childhood sweetheart, is **Jacquelyn Piro** who has the distinct credit of having played both Cosette and Fantine in *Les Misérables* on Broadway. Additional Broadway roles include Ellen in *Miss Saigon* and Nellie in *Sweet Adeline*. Piro won the 2004 Helen Hayes Award (Outstanding Lead Actress, Resident Musical) for her portrayal of Lizzie in

Signature's production of *110 in the Shade*. Portraying Poe's child-bride and cousin Virginia is **Lauren Williams**, who while still a student at Catholic University received a 2004 Helen Hayes Award nomination for the role of Philia in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* at Signature. She is scheduled to appear in *Into the Woods* at Signature next fall.

### **DIRECTION & DESIGN**

**Jenny Cartney** takes the lead as Music Director for the first time at Signature Theatre. She has worked as the Assistant Music Director for such Signature productions as *The Highest Yellow*, *Allegro*, *Follies*, and *The Christmas Carol Rag*. Additional credits include music direction for the reading of Frank Loesser's *Señor Discretion Himself* at the Manhattan Theatre Club and Tony® nominee Euan Morton's cabaret at New York City's Town Hall. Broadway's most prolific orchestrator, **Jonathan Tunick**, teams up with Schaeffer and his Signature team once again. Past Signature projects include *Pacific Overtures*, *The Highest Yellow*, *Allegro*, *Follies*, and *110 in the Shade*. Tunick, one of only five people in the world to hold all four major entertainment awards, has an extensive list of Broadway credits including, among others, *The Color Purple*, *The Frogs*, *Nine*, *Elaine Stritch: At Liberty*, *Titanic*, *Passion*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *A Little Night Music*, *Follies*, *Company*, and *A Chorus Line*.

"One of the most difficult aspects of staging a non-linear piece like *Nevermore* is making the emotional journey connect with the visual elements in the production," says Schaeffer. "The visuals are the connectors that allow the audience to become lost in Poe's world. As I started thinking about the style for the show, I was drawn to the work of Tim Burton. The more research I did, the more gothic it became — dark, black and grey, brooding and moody with the sound of wind whipping through it. Derek McLane has designed a wonderfully haunting set to bring the audience into the unique world of the show — a world that demands the audience let go and take the ride — a ride that turns and twists and scares as it pulsates with life." Schaeffer continued, "I also knew the costumes needed to straddle worlds — they had to be period, but 'hip' period. The score is rock and pop in nature — it definitely has an edge. Since the music is not simple, I wanted the costumes to bridge the gap to support it. Signature's costume shop manager and rapidly burgeoning designer Jenn Miller is the perfect fit for this challenge. She has the style and sass needed to create the sort of rock 'n roll sex appeal we're trying to achieve."

**Derek McLane** makes his Signature debut as the scenic consultant. His Broadway credits include, *Little Women*, *I Am My Own Wife*, *The Women*, *Present Laughter*, *London Assurance*, *Holiday*, *Honour*, *Summer and Smoke*, and *The Three Sisters*. His set designs were seen at the Kennedy Center during the Sondheim Celebration. His work has been recognized with 1997 and 2004 Obie Awards, a Drama-Logue Award, 2003 Michael Merritt Award, 2004 and 2005 Lucille Lortel Awards, and five Drama Desk nominations. Costume Designer **Jenn Miller**'s past Signature credits include *Donna Q*, *Mack and Mabel* (Lubber Run Concert), *One Red Flower*, *Fallen From Proust*, *Ten Unknowns*, and *Yemaya's Belly*. She recently designed the costumes for Rorschach Theatre's production of *The Beard of Avon*.

Completing the design team are Lighting Designer **Mark Lanks** and Sound Designer **Tony Angelini**. Lanks returns to Signature where he was the assistant lighting designer on *Urinetown* and designer for *Pacific Overtures*. He has worked regionally at the NYC Fringe Festival, Shreveport Opera, Provincetown Repertory Company, Granite State Opera, and Stoneham Theatre. To create the proper sound ambiance that suits the show, Sound Designer **Tony Angelini** is hanging the speakers upside down, facing the wall away from the audience. For Signature, Angelini has worked on *Urinetown*, *One Red Flower*, *Elegies*, *Allegro*, *Twentieth Century*, and *The Rhythm Club*. His work has also been heard at the Philadelphia Theatre Co., Kennedy Center, Ford's Theatre, The Shakespeare Theatre, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, and The San Diego Rep.

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**NEVERMORE RELATED ITEMS****Signature Speaks Blog**

On Monday, December 12, Signature Theatre launched a blog called **Signature Speaks** for Director Eric Schaeffer and the cast to share with patrons their progress on developing and rehearsing *Nevermore*. The blog is used as a forum for audiences to receive rare, insightful behind-the-scenes information on current and upcoming Signature projects and happenings. Signature provided an unprecedented preview of songs from *Nevermore* in advance of the opening. The songs were available for downloading as MP3 files. Three songs are currently available with the final song scheduled to be posted on Monday, January 9. Signature Speaks can be viewed at [www.signature-theatre.org/blog](http://www.signature-theatre.org/blog).

**Corcoran Gallery Discussion**

Director Eric Schaeffer and composer Matt Conner will lead a discussion about Edgar Allan Poe and his life at the Corcoran Gallery. *Nevermore* cast members Daniel Cooney (Edgar), Florence Lacey (Mother), and Amy McWilliams (A Whore) will sing some of the hauntingly beautiful songs from the world premiere musical. Tickets to a performance of *Nevermore* at Signature, which includes a post-show discussion with the entire cast, are available at a discount when bought in conjunction with the event at the Corcoran.

**Monday, February 13 at 7:00p.m.**

Edgar Allan Poe discussion at the Corcoran Gallery  
 Ticket prices: Corcoran Members \$15  
 Public \$20

**Tuesday, February 21 at 7:30p.m.**

Performance of *Nevermore* with a post-show discussion at Signature Theatre  
 Ticket prices (includes Feb. 13 event): Corcoran Members \$47  
 Public \$52

**To order tickets, contact the Corcoran Gallery at (202) 639-1700.**

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**NEVERMORE**

Music by Matt Conner

Lyrics adapted from the writings of Edgar Allan Poe

Book by Grace Barnes

**Cast** (in alphabetical order)

Edgar	<b>Daniel Cooney</b>
Mother	<b>Florence Lacey</b>
Muddy	<b>Channez McQuay</b>
A Whore	<b>Amy McWilliams</b>
Elmira	<b>Jacquelyn Piro</b>
Virginia	<b>Lauren Williams</b>

— MORE —

**Direction & Design**

Director/Musical Staging	<b>Eric Schaeffer</b>	Costume Design	<b>Jenn Miller</b>
Music Director	<b>Jenny Cartney</b>	Lighting Design	<b>Mark Lanks</b>
Orchestrations	<b>Jonathan Tunick</b>	Sound Design	<b>Tony Angelini</b>
Scenic Consultant	<b>Derek McLane</b>	Stage Manager	<b>Kerry Epstein</b>

**Schedule**

**January 10 – February 26, 2006**

Press Date: Sunday, January 15

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

**Tickets**

Tickets are \$31 to \$55 and are available by calling Tickets.com (800) 955-5566 and online at [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org). 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.

**About Signature Theatre**

Signature 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 downtown 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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