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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SIGNATURE OPENS 15<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SEASON WITH THE POWERFULLY GRIPPING MUSICAL *ONE RED FLOWER***

- **Premiere of Emmy-winner Paris Barclay's revised script**
- **Musical inspired by "Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam"**

Arlington, VA — Signature Theatre opens its 2004-2005 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season with an intimate, searing look at war through the eyes of the men who fought and died in Vietnam. The tides of war come to life in *One Red Flower*, a startling new musical created from actual letters written home by soldiers serving in the Vietnam War during 1969. Set to a score based in the rock-n-roll rhythms of the period, the story compels, informs and entertains with a glimpse into the often hellish, sometimes light-hearted experiences of our American soldiers. The basis and inspiration for the characters, lyrics and script was "Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam," a published collection of actual letters to and from soldiers edited by Bernard Edelman for the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission. This timely work by Emmy-winner **Paris Barclay** reminds us how the present is often a reflection of the past. ***One Red Flower*, directed by Eric Schaeffer, runs August 17 – October 3, 2004, at Signature Theatre. Tickets are now on sale! Call (703) 218-6500 or visit [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org).**

"Signature presented a free reading of *One Red Flower* last fall as part of our STAGES series and I knew immediately that this show must be done on the Signature stage and done *now*," said Director **ERIC SCHAEFFER**. "War is ugly. War is painful. War never ends on the battlefield. As we watch again the sight of American soldiers deployed to foreign lands, these haunting letters remind us that the pain of war reaches far beyond the combat zone. We remember that the horrors of battle touch us all. I can only hope that this musical inspires conversations and sparks debates in the days and weeks ahead. One of the characters in *One Red Flower* asks, 'What are we fighting for?' We find there is no simple answer."

For author/composer **PARIS BARCLAY**, work began on this show in 1986 after he read "Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam." In developing the script, Barclay tried to stay true to the words of the real-life soldiers, "Ninety-five percent of what you will hear are their own words – their optimism and patriotism, their fear and longing, their anti-war and pro-war stances. I have tried to voice them as fairly and as free of commentary as possible," Barclay says.

Barclay is a two-time Emmy Award winning director of *NYPD Blue*, *The West Wing* and *ER*. Paris also co-created and directed the primetime drama *City of Angels*, which won the NAACP Image Award for Best Drama Series, and episodes of shows as diverse as *Cold Case* and *Clueless*, *Sliders* and *The Shield*, *American Dreams* and *Fastlane*. For the theatre, Paris wrote the book, music and lyrics for *On Hold With Music* (produced in workshop at the Manhattan Theater Club with Jason Alexander) and *Almos' a Man* (based on a Richard Wright short story and produced at SoHo Rep). He wrote music for and co-directed last year's *Order My Steps*, a gospel musical at the Cornerstone Theater Company. He is currently the writer, director and executive producer of a new pilot for Showtime entitled *Hate*.

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— MORE —

The cast of *One Red Flower* includes six young soldiers deployed to Vietnam and the mother of one of the soldiers waiting back home for her son's safe return. Artistic license combined with a strong foundation of actual letters and poems written home by soldiers to friends and family was the basis for all seven characters in the show, but military ranks, names and final outcome of the show's characters have been altered.

**KURT BOEHM** is among many of the performers to make their debut on the Signature stage in *One Red Flower*. Boehm plays the infantryman Private First Class Alan Chisholm, a character based on the letters of Air Force Major Edward Alan Brudno. Major Brudno, assigned to the 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron, was shot down over North Vietnam on October 18, 1965. He was a prisoner of war for seven and a half years before returning home in 1973. On June 3, four months after his release and one day before his 33rd birthday, Major Brudno committed suicide. He was the first of the 566 returned Vietnam POWs to die. In May of this year his name was added to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

**JOSHUA DAVIS** also makes his Signature debut as the career soldier Sergeant George McDuffy. The basis for this character started with the letters of Sp/4 George T. Olsen who arrived in Vietnam in August 1969, a Ranger with Company G, 75th Infantry, Americal Division, operating in the area around Chu Lai. During his first month in country, he shared the following in a letter to a college girlfriend, "...it is so very easy to kill in war. There's no remorse, no theatrical 'washing of the hands' to get rid of the nonexistent blood, not even any regrets. When it happens, you are more afraid [than] you've ever been in your life... You're scared, really scared, and there's no thinking about it. ...you desperately want to live, to go home, to get drunk or walk down the street on a date again." Ranger Olsen was killed in action on March 3, 1970 at the age of 23.

**CLIFTON A. DUNCAN**, another member of the cast making a Signature debut, plays the officer First Lieutenant Kenny Rutherford inspired by the letters of Kenneth E. Peeples, Jr. and his parents Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth E. Peeples, Sr. Sp/4 Peeples, Jr. served with Company A, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, operating in III Corps, from June 1996 until he was wounded in February 1967. His father wrote him that month, "Today we received your Purple Heart medal. I looked at it with mixed emotions. Happy, because you are out of Vietnam; sad, because of the price you had to pay to get away from there... I know that you were bitterly against going into the service... I also knew of your feelings about the U.S. and its treatment of Negroes. Yet, in spite of these conditions, you did everything that was asked of you... you are coming home a hero to us. Not a war hero, because you had to fight and get shot, but more so because you made a man's decision and stuck it out."

**CHARLES HAGERTY** returns to Signature where he previously appeared in the benefit performance *Clap Loud, Throw Money*. Hagerty plays the helicopter pilot Warrant Officer Michael Sandberg, a character centered on the poems of Michael Davis O'Donnell. O'Donnell, then a captain with the 52<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group, 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade, was based at Dak To and Pleiku. While attempting to rescue eight soldiers on March 24, 1970, the helicopter he was piloting was shot down near Ben Het. He and three crewmembers were declared missing in action. O'Donnell's status was changed to killed in action in 1978, a year after he was promoted to major.

**FLORENCE LACEY** was most recently seen at Signature as Sally in *Follies*. Her character of Billy's mother, Eleanor Bridges, is the sole female role in *One Red Flower* and is based on Mrs. Eleanor Wimbish, the mother of William R. Stocks. Mrs. Wimbish leaves letters to her son under his name at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: "Dear Bill, Today is February 13, 1984. I came to this black wall again to see and touch your name, and as I do I wonder if anyone ever stops to realize that next to your name, on this black wall, is your mother's heart. A heart broken 15 years ago today, when you lost your life in Vietnam. ...They tell me the letters I write to you and leave here at this memorial are waking others up to the fact that there is still

much pain left, after all these years, from the Vietnam War. But this I know. I would rather to have had you for 21 years, and all the pain that goes with losing you, than never to have had you at all.”

**JOSH LEFKOWITZ** makes his Signature debut as the medic Specialist Fifth Class Marion Johnson, a character inspired by the letters of Marion Lee “Sandy” Kempner. 2Lt. Kempner arrived in Vietnam in 1966 as a platoon leader with Company M, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, operating in I Corps. Two months after recovering from gunshot wounds, he was killed by a mine explosion near Tien Phu. He was 24 years old. Less than three weeks prior to his death he wrote to his great-aunt about a lone “rather distinguished-looking plant with soft red flowers waving gaily in the downpour” explaining that it was “the first plant I have seen today which didn’t have thorns on it... The plant, and the hill upon which it grew, was also representative of Vietnam. It is a country of thorns and cuts, of guns and marauding, of little hope and of great failure. Yet in the midst of it all, a beautiful thought, gesture, and even person can arise among it waving bravely at the death that pours down upon it.”

**STEPHEN GREGORY SMITH**, fresh from his recent Helen Hayes win for *110 in the Shade*, returns to Signature to portray the company clerk Specialist Fourth Class Billy “Spanky” Bridges, son of Eleanor Bridges. The character basis was Sp/5 William R. Stocks, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 198<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, stationed at Chu Lai. On December 26, 1968, “Spanky” as he was nicknamed by his lieutenant, wrote to his parents, “I had a pretty good Christmas. I got to see the Bob Hope show, and was it ever something to see. They could only let so many from each company go, and I was one of the lucky ones.” After only four and a half months in country, the resupply helicopter Stocks was flying in crashed and burned at Chu Lai on February 13, 1969. He was 21 years old.

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Premiere Production

***ONE RED FLOWER***

A Musical Play

Music by Paris Barclay

Book and Lyrics adapted for the stage by Paris Barclay

from the book “Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam” edited by Bernard Edelman

for the New York Vietnam Veterans Memorial Commission

**The Cast**

Private First Class Alan Chisholm

Sergeant George McDuffy

First Lieutenant Kenny Rutherford

Warrant Officer Michael Sandberg

Eleanor Bridges

Specialist Fifth Class Marion Johnson

Specialist Fourth Class Billy “Spanky” Bridges

**Kurt Boehm**

**Joshua Davis\***

**Clifton A. Duncan**

**Charles Hagerty\***

**Florence Lacey\***

**Josh Lefkowitz**

**Stephen Gregory Smith\***

**The Creative Team**

Director

**Eric Schaeffer**

Setting

**Eric Grims**

Costumes

**Jenn Miller**

Lighting

**Chris Lee**

Sound

**Tony Angelini**

Projection Design

**Michael Clark**

Properties

**Elsie Jones**

Stage Manager

**Jess W. Speaker III\***

**Performance Schedule****August 17 – October 3, 2004***Press Date:* Sunday, August 22, 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 show on Tuesday, August 24.**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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