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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DIRECTOR ERIC SCHAEFFER PUTS HIS UNIQUE SPIN ON A CHAMBER-SIZED VERSION OF SONDHEIM'S FAR EAST MUSICAL JOURNEY, *PACIFIC OVERTURES*

- **Production helmed by 2005 Helen Hayes Award-winners, Director Eric Schaeffer and Musical Director Jon Kalbfleisch**
- **Schaeffer collaborates with Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman on revised script for streamlined cast of 10, including a new finale**
- **Jonathan Tunick creates new orchestrations**

Arlington, VA — Spanning 120 years of Japan’s fascinating history, *Pacific Overtures* tells a brilliant tale of culture clash as sparked by America’s 1853 mission to Westernize Japan. The story of Japan’s emergence from an isolated country rooted in tradition to its current position at the forefront of international politics is told through the eyes of Kayama and Manjiro — two friends turned bitter enemies as they struggle with traditional and Western influences. *Pacific Overtures* features Sondheim’s most daring music — an adventurous blend of Broadway razzle-dazzle and pure Eastern beauty. **“Sondheim’s score is majestic,”** declares London’s *Daily News*. **“Exquisite songs,”** proclaims *Newsday*. Based on the ancient form of Kabuki theatre, a small chamber version of *Pacific Overtures* is thrilling in Signature’s intimate space. 2005 Helen Hayes Award-winners Eric Schaeffer (Outstanding Director, Resident Musical, *Allegro*) and Jon Kalbfleisch (Outstanding Musical Direction, Resident Play or Musical, *The Highest Yellow*) helm the production team. ***Pacific Overtures* runs May 17 – July 3, 2005, at Signature Theatre.**

“Pacific Overtures is the perfect swan song for Sondheim musicals presented in Signature’s garage-space before we move to our new complex in the Village at Shirlington,” expressed **Eric Schaeffer**. “This show marks our twelfth Sondheim musical in the past fourteen years. It’s become our annual tradition to present new productions and reinventions of the greatest composer in the American musical theatre. I’ve been working with Steve [Sondheim] and John [Weidman] on a new script for Signature’s version of the show, which features a streamlined cast of ten actors. There are things in this new version that folks haven’t heard before. We’re also using new orchestrations from Jonathan Tunick for our seven-piece orchestra. Both Steve and John are very intrigued with how we’re doing our production. They love new discoveries in their work. It’s been nothing but pure pleasure reinventing this piece for our stage as the perfect finale for our fifteenth birthday season.”

The most daunting challenge for Schaeffer was the size of the cast. The original production boasted a cast of 39 and a 22-piece orchestra. Schaeffer had a very different vision. “When I started working on the show I knew that we had to reduce the cast,” Schaeffer explained. “I kept reading the script and while the show feels big, it really is a very intimate story between two men and two worlds. I didn’t want the emotion and human connection lost in elaborate pageantry. Previous productions have been huge — done in Kabuki style and full of big sets and large colors. We needed to invent our own unique style of Kabuki that carries us through the entire piece and I went the direct opposite in terms of design. The cast of ten play multiple characters — it’s a great challenge for all of them.”

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THE CAST

Appearing in her eleventh Sondheim show at Signature, the cast is led by **Donna Migliaccio** as the first ever woman cast as the Reciter. Other Sondheim roles at Signature have included Domina in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, Carlotta Campion in *Follies*, Rose in *Gypsy*, Charlotte in *A Little Night Music*, Sara Jane Moore in *Assassins*, and Mrs. Lovett in both productions of *Sweeney Todd*. Mostly recently she portrayed The Madam in the world premiere of Michael John LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow*, then appeared in *Elegies: A Song Cycle* for the Philadelphia Theatre Company, a role she performed for Signature in 2004. She will be back next season as Ms. Pennywise in Signature's fall production of *Urinetown*. Three-time Helen Hayes Award nominee **Will Gartshore** plays Kayama. Gartshore was most recently seen on the Signature stage in *Elegies: A Song Cycle* and as the lead in *Allegro*. Additional Signature credits include *Twentieth Century*, *Follies*, *Grand Hotel*, *Side Show*, and *Floyd Collins*. Other credits include *Passion* and *The Glass Menagerie* at The Kennedy Center, *Stephen Sondheim's 70th Birthday Celebration* at the Library of Congress, and *Parade* on Broadway.

The other eight members of the cast play a multitude of nearly 50 characters. **Michael Bunce** makes his first appearance at Signature. Among his credits are *Regina* at The Kennedy Center and the national tours of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Victor/Victoria*. **Matt Conner** also makes his first appearance on the Signature stage where the world premiere of his musical *Nevermore*, written with collaborator Norman Allen, will be seen next season. **Steven Cupo** returns to the Signature stage having been seen in such shows as ...*Forum*, *Follies*, and *Cabaret* (Helen Hayes Award; *Washingtonian's* "Best Performances in 25 Years"). **Daniel Felton** appeared in Signature's world premiere production of Kander and Ebb's *Over & Over*, the US premiere of *The Fix* produced by Cameron Mackintosh, *Side Show*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Assassins* among others. Having performed in the region for over twenty years, *Pacific Overtures* marks **Channez McQuay's** first show at Signature. Other area theatres include, Studio Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, and Rep Stage. **Thomas Adrian Simpson** last appeared at Signature in *Twentieth Century* where additional appearances have included *110 in the Shade*, *Grand Hotel*, *Floyd Collins*, and *Over & Over*. **Stephen Gregory Smith**, quickly becoming a Signature staple, appeared in the world premieres of Michael John LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow*, *One Red Flower*, *Allegro*, and *110 in the Shade* (2004 Helen Hayes Award, Outstanding Supporting Actor). Signature Artistic Associate **Harry A. Winter** has been in numerous Signature shows such as *The Highest Yellow*, *Allegro*, *Follies*, and *110 in the Shade*.

THE DIRECTION & DESIGN

Teaming up once again with Schaeffer are musical director **Jon Kalbfleisch** and choreographer **Karma Camp**. A three-time Helen Hayes Award recipient for Outstanding Musical Direction, Kalbfleisch has conducted over 1,000 performances of some 20 musicals in his role as Signature Theatre's resident music director. Most recent productions include *The Highest Yellow*, *One Red Flower*, *Elegies: A Song Cycle*, *Allegro*, *Follies*, and *110 in the Shade*. Kalbfleisch leads the seven-piece orchestra who occasionally use Japanese instruments. As he recently told *The Washington Post*, "Sondheim wrote Western music but with tonalities that evoke Japanese music." Camp's extensive credits include *The Graduate* on Broadway with Kathleen Turner, *Merrily We Roll Along* at The Kennedy Center Sondheim Celebration, the first national tour of *big*, and *Never The Sinner Off-Broadway*. As an artistic associate at Signature Theatre she has choreographed over 15 productions, most with Schaeffer including *Follies*, *110 in the Shade* and *The Gospel According to Fishman*.

In an unusual turn, **Eric Schaeffer** developed the set design. The director explains, "I had been doing so much research for the show that when my original designer had to pull out because of other commitments I thought I might as well do this myself. I knew what I wanted, I knew the feeling it had to express, and the world I wanted to create. It actually was a lot of fun — I hadn't designed a set in 13 years and it was

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good to go back to it. As I began, I researched modern Japanese graphic design. For our production, the show is very visual and graphic in style, so using that slickness in creating the island of Japan was what I wanted to capture. I didn't want the world of the play to be in a temple, but to instead create the sense of something more remote that needed to be transformed."

Working at Signature for the first time is lighting designer **Mark Lanks** whose recent designs include *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Granite State Opera, *The Violet Hour* at the Stoneham Theatre, *Jasper Lake* for the NYC Fringe Festival, and *World Goes Round*, *Inherit the Wind*, and *On Your Toes* at the Cape Playhouse. Signature Theatre artistic associate and costume designer **Anne Kennedy**'s recent designs include the Off-Broadway productions of *Under the Bridge*, *Cam Jansen*, and *Boy; The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?* at Arena Stage; and *The Highest Yellow* at Signature. Sound designer **Tony Angelini**'s recent shows at Signature include *The Highest Yellow*, *One Red Flower*, *Allegro*, *Twentieth Century*, *Follies*, and *110 in the Shade*. **Katherine Osborne** created the properties.

PACIFIC OVERTURES

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by John Weidman

Additional material by Hugh Wheeler

The Cast (in alphabetical order)

Michael Bunce	Shogun's Mother, Merchant, Officer, British Admiral, Sailor
Matt Conner	Tomate, Son, Kanagawa Girl, Commodore Perry, Lord, Daughter
Steven Cupo	Lord Abe, Observer, Soothsayer, Kanagawa Girl
Daniel Felton	Manjiro, Fisherman, Priest, Warrior, American Admiral
Will Gartshore	Kayama
Channez McQuay	Councilor, Grandmother, Wife, Madam, Officer, Noble, Lord
Donna Migliaccio	Reciter, Shogun, Emperor
Thomas Adrian Simpson	Councilor, Companion, Priest, Russian Admiral, Sailor, Assassin
Stephen Gregory Smith	Samurai, Observer, Officer, Priest, Kanagawa Girl, Boy, French Admiral, Sailor
Harry A. Winter	Samurai, Thief, Physician, Kanagawa Girl, Old Man, Dutch Admiral, Storyteller

The Creative Team

Director	Eric Schaeffer	Costume Designer	Anne Kennedy
Choreographer	Karma Camp	Sound Designer	Tony Angelini
Music Director	Jon Kalbfleisch	Orchestrations	Jonathan Tunick
Set Designer	Eric Schaeffer	Properties	Katherine Osborne
Lighting Designer	Mark Lanks	Stage Manager	Jess W. Speaker, III

Performance Schedule

May 17 – July 3, 2005

Press Date: Sunday, May 22

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 is no show on Tuesday, May 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. 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 15th season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 191 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theatre 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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