

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 27, 2006

SIGNATURE THEATRE

TO RECEIVE
A MILLION DOLLAR GRANT
FROM

THE SHEN FAMILY FOUNDATION

FOR

THE AMERICAN MUSICAL VOICES PROJECT

A TWO-PART PROJECT CONSISTING OF

MUSICAL THEATRE COMPOSER GRANTS
FOR THE CREATION, DEVELOPMENT AND PRODUCTION
OF NEW WORKS

TO BE PRESENTED TO
RICKY IAN GORDON, MICHAEL JOHN LaCHIUSA
AND **JOSEPH THALKEN**

AND

MUSICAL THEATRE LEADERSHIP AWARDS
FOR EXTRAORDINARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO NEW MUSICAL THEATRE

TO BE PRESENTED TO
BRUCE COUGHLIN, ADAM GUETTEL,
AUDRA McDONALD AND TED SPERLING

GRANTS AND AWARDS TO BE PRESENTED
IN NEW YORK CITY AT NEW WORLD STAGES
ON MONDAY, MAY 15, 2006

Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer** is proud to announce a million dollar grant to **Signature Theatre** of Arlington, VA, from **The Shen Family Foundation**. Thanks to this generous grant, Signature will launch **The American Musical Voices Project**, an unprecedented two-prong program of the Signature Theatre consisting of Musical Theatre Composer Grants and Musical Theatre Leadership Awards. In recognition of The Shen Family Foundation's generosity, the Project and its constituent programs will be named for the Foundation.

The Musical Theatre Composer Grants will be awarded to **Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa** and **Joseph Thalken**. Each composer will receive a grant in the amount of \$25,000 a year for four years. The program will also underwrite the workshopping and presenting of the composers' new musicals by Signature Theatre over the course of the next four theatre seasons. Signature will premiere a full production of one of these new musicals in each year beginning with the 2007-08 season. Eric Schaeffer will oversee and direct all three new productions.

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More . . .

The **Musical Theatre Leadership Awards** portion of the project will recognize four individuals for their extraordinary influence on and contribution to the advancement of new musical theatre. The recipients will be orchestrator **Bruce Coughlin**, composer **Adam Guettel**, singer/actress **Audra McDonald**, and director/musical director/orchestrator **Ted Sperling**. Each Leadership Award is presented in conjunction with a one-time grant in the amount of \$25,000 to support the artist's continued contributions to musical theatre.

“The Shen Family Foundation, which is committed to supporting and encouraging excellence, originality and high aspiration in musical theatre music-writing, believes Signature Theatre is the ideal home for this unique project,” said **Theodore P. Shen**, Chairman of the Foundation. “Only an organization like Signature, which has established itself as a leading force in the country in revitalizing musical theatre through its commitment to and artistic success in reinventing musical classics and developing new works, could undertake such a bold and exemplary initiative to commission and produce three new musicals from scratch. And Signature’s new building, with its two flexible black box spaces designed with outstanding acoustics for musical theatre together with its three rehearsal rooms, provides the perfect venue for developing the commissioned works from start to finish.” Included in the million dollar grant is \$250,000 designated to Signature Theatre’s capital campaign to support the new theatre complex in the Village at Shirlington and to nurture Signature’s artistic and organizational expansion. In recognition of this gift, the large rehearsal room in the new building will be named in honor of The Shen Family Foundation.

The presentation of The American Musical Voices Project composer grants and Leadership Awards will take place on Monday, May 15, 2006, at a cocktail reception to be held at New World Stages in New York City (340 West 50th Street). The reception, beginning at 5PM, will also feature performances of the honored composers’ work by some of the musical theatre’s brightest stars, including Ms. McDonald, Tony ® nominee **Kelli O’Hara** (*The Pajama Game*, *The Light in the Piazza*) and Tony ® nominee **Howard McGillin** (*The Phantom of the Opera*).

**More on Signature Theatre’s
American Musical Voices Project
sponsored by The Shen Family Foundation:**

Project Timeline

2006-07 season - Signature Theatre will present a workshop of a new Michael John LaChiusa musical and a cabaret featuring the work of the three composers.

2007-08 season - Signature will present a workshop of a new Joseph Thalken musical and the full production of Michael John LaChiusa’s new musical.

2008-09 season - Signature will present a workshop of Ricky Ian Gordon’s new musical and a full production of Joseph Thalken’s new musical.

2009-10 season - Signature will present a full production of Ricky Ian Gordon’s new musical.

The Shen Foundation Musical Theatre Composer Grant Recipients

Ricky Ian Gordon’s credits include *My Life With Albertine* (Playwrights Horizons, 2002 AT&T Award), *Dream True* (The Vineyard Theater, Richard Rodgers Production Award), *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead* (Houston Grand Opera and The American Music Theater Festival), *Only Heaven* (Encompass Opera), *Stonewall/ Night Variations* (En Garde Arts), *States Of Independence* (The American Music Theater Festival), *Autumn Valentine* (Opera Omaha’s 1992

Fall Festival), *Morning Star* (Lyric Opera of Chicago), *Art Song Dance* (a collaboration with choreographer Sean Curran at The Joyce Theater), *Orpheus and Euridice* (Lincoln Center's New Visions Series American Songbook and Great Performers Series). Current projects include an opera of *The Grapes Of Wrath* with Michael Korie for Minnesota and Utah, slated for a February 2007 premiere, and *For My Family*, for which he is also the book writer and lyricist, which has already had a developmental workshop at The Sundance Theater Lab. Previous awards include the National Institute For Music Theater Award, the Stephen Sondheim Award, The Gilman and Gonzalez-Falla Music Theater Foundation Award, the Jonathan Larson Foundation Award, the Constance Klinsky Award, and a National Institute For Music Theater Award. His work can be heard on numerous cast recordings as well as Audra McDonald's *Way Back To Paradise*, and *Bright Eyed Joy: The Songs Of Ricky Ian Gordon*.

Michael John LaChiusa is a composer, lyricist and writer whose credits include *SEND (who are you? I love you)*, which recently premiered at the Houston Grand Opera as part of *An Evening With Audra McDonald*; *Bernarda Alba* (Lincoln Center Theater); *See What I Wanna See* (The Public Theater); *The Highest Yellow* (Signature Theatre); *Little Fish* (Second Stage); *The Nutcracker* (a new musical version in collaboration with Amon Miyamoto which premiered in 2002 in Tokyo); *Lovers and Friends* (Lyric Opera of Chicago); *The Wild Party* (The Public, Tony ® nominations for Best Musical, Book and Score), *Marie Christine* (LCT, Tony ® nominations for Best Score and Best Book of a Musical), *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (LCT, Tony ® nominations for Best Musical and Book), *The Petrified Prince* (The Public); *Hello Again* (LCT, Drama Desk nominations for Music, Lyrics and Book) and *First Lady Suite*, among others.

Emerging composer **Joseph Thalken** recently burst into the world of musical theatre with two impressive premieres: *Harold and Maude: The Musical* with book and lyrics by the legendary Tom Jones based on the cult film favorite, and the musical adaptation of Geoff Ryman's celebrated novel *Was*, originally developed at Lincoln Center Theater. Thalken was one of the many young composers who collaborated with lyricist Mark Campbell on the innovative song-cycle *Songs from an Unmade Bed*.

Musical Theatre Leadership Award Recipients

Bruce Coughlin has created the orchestrations for many shows, including Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza* (with Ted Sperling and Adam Guettel, for which they received Tony® and Drama Desk Awards), and *Floyd Collins* (Obie Award and Drama Desk nomination); Ricky Ian Gordon's upcoming *Grapes of Wrath* and *My Life With Albertine*; Michael John LaChiusa's *SEND (who are you? I love you)*, *See What I Wanna See*, *Little Fish* and *The Wild Party*; as well as the current Off-Broadway hit *Grey Gardens*, *Urinetown* (Tony and Drama Desk nominations), the Tony ® and Grammy Award-winning revival of *Annie Get Your Gun*, *On the Town*, *The Sound of Music*, *Triumph of Love*, *Once Upon a Mattress* and *The King & I*.

Composer **Adam Guettel's** work includes *The Light in the Piazza* (Tony and Drama Desk Awards for Music and Orchestrations); *Floyd Collins* (Playwrights Horizons), *Lydie Breeze* (New York Theatre Workshop), *Love's Fire* (collaboration with John Guare for The Acting Company); *Saturn Returns* (The Public Theater). Recordings: *The Light in the Piazza*, *Floyd Collins* and *Myths and Hymns*, in addition to the four songs featured on Audra McDonald's *Way Back to Paradise*. Mr. Guettel is the recipient of the Stephen Sondheim Award (1996), the Lucille Lortel Award (1996) and the ASCAP New Horizons Award (1997).

Audra McDonald is a four-time Tony® Award winner (for her roles in *Carousel*, *Master Class*, *Ragtime* and *A Raisin in the Sun*). Her other Broadway appearances include Lincoln Center's acclaimed revival of *Henry IV* and *Marie Christine* (Tony nomination). She recently

appeared at the Houston Grand Opera in *An Evening With Audra McDonald*, featuring Michael John LaChiusa's *SEND (who are you? I love you)*. Among her numerous television credits, she is an Emmy nominee for "Wit," directed by Mike Nichols. She has released three solo albums: *Happy Songs*, *How Glory Goes* and *Way Back to Paradise* and her other recordings include a live concert of *Dreamgirls*, *Sweeney Todd: Live at the Philharmonic*, *Cradle Will Rock* (BMG) and *Wonderful Town* (EMI).

Ted Sperling recently directed Michael John LaChiusa's *See What I Wanna See* at The Public Theater. His work as a music director and orchestrator includes the current Broadway hits *The Light in the Piazza* (Tony® and Drama Desk Awards with co-orchestrators Bruce Coughlin and Adam Guettel) and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* as well as *A Man of No Importance*, *A New Brain* and *My Favorite Year* (for LCT); *The Full Monty*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *How to Succeed . . .*, *Saturn Returns* and *Floyd Collins*.

The American Musical Voices Project Partners

Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theatre dedicated to producing contemporary plays and musicals, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. Located in Arlington, VA, Signature is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with an intimate playing space, and using live orchestras with unamplified performers. In addition to the finest talent from the Washington, D.C. metro-area, Signature has been a home to such luminaries as Cameron Mackintosh, Stephen Sondheim, Terrence McNally, John Kander and the late Fred Ebb. Now in its 16th season under Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer, Signature has been nominated for 209 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the professional theatre (18 nominations in 2006), and has received 50 Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2005 and 2006. Signature was also honored by the Jonathan Larson Performing Arts Foundation for "its artistic vision and commitment to the support and development of musical theatre artists." A committed and intrepid producer of new work, Signature has presented 21 world premiere productions and six world premiere commissions to date, including *Nevermore* by Matt Conner and Grace Barnes (2006), Michael John LaChiusa's *The Highest Yellow* (2004), *The Gospel According to Fishman* by Michael Lazar and Richard Oberacker (2002), *The Rhythm Club* by Chad Bequelin and Matt Sklar (2000), and Kander and Ebb's *Over & Over* (1999). Other musical theatre works developed at Signature include the rarely seen Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Allegro* with a new book adaptation by Joe DiPietro (2004), *110 in the Shade* by Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt with new orchestrations by Jonathan Tunick (2003), the American premiere of *The Fix* by John Dempsey and Dana Rowe (1998), and a revised version of *The Rink* by Kander, Ebb and McNally (1996). The works of Stephen Sondheim remain Signature's signature. The tradition began in 1991 with *Sweeney Todd*, earning five Helen Hayes Awards, including Outstanding Musical. The upstart young company followed its breakout triumph with the first regional staging of *Assassins* outside of New York and earned a second consecutive Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Musical. Subsequent productions include *Company*, *Into the Woods*, *Passion*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *A Stephen Sondheim Evening*, *A Little Night Music*, *Gypsy*, *Putting It Together*, *Follies*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and *Pacific Overtures*.

The Shen Family Foundation, within its broader focus on education and the arts, is committed to supporting and encouraging excellence, originality and high aspiration in musical theatre music-writing through its Musical Theatre Composers Project. Inspired by the extraordinary, innovative musical theatre works of Stephen Sondheim, the Foundation has engaged with non-profit theatre organizations to help fund more than 25 projects since 2002 involving the creation, development, production and cast recordings of works by Mr. Sondheim and the next generation of innovative musical theatre composers, including Ricky Ian Gordon, Adam Guettel, Michael John LaChiusa and Joseph Thalken. Productions for which the

Foundation has provided or committed major funding include: the Kennedy Center's *Sondheim Celebration* (2002); Stephen Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* Original Cast Reunion Concert (Musical Theatre Works, 2002), *Assassins* (Roundabout Theatre, 2004), *The Frogs* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2004) and *Pacific Overtures* (Roundabout, 2004); Symphony Space's *Wall to Wall Sondheim* (2005); Ricky Ian Gordon's *My Life with Albertine* (Playwrights Horizons, 2003), *Grapes of Wrath* (Minnesota Opera, 2007) and *States of Independence* (Northwestern University, 2008); Adam Guettel's *The Light in the Piazza* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2005); Michael John LaChiusa's *R Shomon* (Williamstown Theatre Festival, 2004), *The Highest Yellow* (Signature Theatre, 2004), *See What I Wanna See* (Public Theater, 2005), *Bernarda Alba* (Lincoln Center Theater, 2006) and *Send (who are you? I love you)* (Houston Grand Opera, 2006); and Joseph Thalken's *Was* (Human Race Theater, 2004, and Northwestern University, 2005) and *Harold and Maude* (Paper Mill Playhouse, 2005, and TheatreWorks, 2005). The Foundation has also provided separate major funding for the cast recordings of: Stephen Sondheim's *Pacific Overtures* (2005); Ricky Ian Gordon's *Only Heaven* (2002), *My Life with Albertine* (2003), *Dream True* (2006) and *Orpheus and Euridice* (2006); and Michael John LaChiusa's *See What I Wanna See* (2006) and *Bernarda Alba* (2006).

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