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**signature**news

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## Signature Theatre Presents the Washington, D.C. Premiere of *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*

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One-Man Show Written and Performed by  
E. Patrick Johnson to Play Limited Engagement

Arlington, VA, August 17, 2011 – In a special limited engagement, **Signature Theatre** is presenting the Washington D.C. premiere of **E. Patrick Johnson's** one-man show, ***Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South***. Based on his award-winning and critically acclaimed book, Mr. Johnson stars in this exploration into the southern black gay community – a population rarely acknowledged in writings about the South. Directed by **Rajendra Maharaj** (*365 Days* at New York's Public Theatre, and *Marat Sade* at the Classical Theatre of Harlem), ***Sweet Tea*** collects life stories from black gay men of all ages who were born, raised, and continue to live in the southern United States. ***Sweet Tea*** will play in Signature's intimate ARK Theatre from **September 13 – October 9, 2011**. Single tickets are available at \$41 each.

"From the moment I first experienced ***Sweet Tea***, I knew that it had to come to Washington and have its area premiere right here at Signature," said **Eric Schaeffer**, Signature's Artistic Director. "Patrick is an extraordinary voice, an important ambassador, and a gifted artist. Signature is proud to be home to his intimate and poignant story."

Inspired by **Johnson's** personal journey, ***Sweet Tea*** explores the perceptions, angst, triumphs and vulnerabilities of this minority within a minority. With this play, **Johnson** reinforces the spoken-word tradition while challenging stereotypes – and finding humor, humanity and hope within.

**Johnson** stated, "I am overjoyed about bringing ***Sweet Tea*** to Signature and the D.C./NOVA area." He added, "In many ways, opening the show at Signature is like a "homecoming," because the impetus for writing the book came from a gathering sponsored by US Helping US, People Into Living, Inc., a black HIV/AIDS outreach group based in D.C. It was at that gathering in 1995 that the tales by older black men encouraged me to collect the stories of as many southern black men of the South as I could so that there could be a living archive for generations to come. It's an honor for me to bring these stories back "home" to where it all began."

## **ABOUT E. PATRICK JOHNSON**

**E. Patrick Johnson** is Carlos Montezuma Professor of Performance Studies and African American Studies at Northwestern University and an Artistic Fellow at the Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media at Columbia College, Chicago, where he developed *Sweet Tea* into a play. A scholar/artist, Johnson has performed nationally and internationally and has published widely in the area of race, gender, sexuality and performance. His one-man show, "Strange Fruit—A Performance About Identity Politics," toured around the country from 1999 – 2004, and he has toured his staged reading, "Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of the South Tell Their Tales" to over 80 college campuses around the country. He is the author of *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* published by Duke University Press (2003), which won several awards, including the Lilla A. Heston Award, the Errol Hill Book Award, and was a finalist for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award. He is co-editor (with Mae G. Henderson) of *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* with Duke University Press (2005). His most recent book, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South—An Oral History* (2008), is published by the University of North Carolina Press and was named a Stonewall Book Award Honor Book, by the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Round Table of the American Library Association. Johnson also recorded the audio version of the book in 2009. In 2010, Johnson was awarded the Randy Majors Award for Outstanding Contributions to LGBT Scholarship in Communication by the LGBT Caucus of the National Communication Association, the Leslie Irene Coger Award for Distinguished Performance by the Performance Studies Division of the National Communication Association, the Black Theater Alliance Award for Best Solo Performance for his performance in *Sweet Tea*, and was inducted into the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.

## **ABOUT RAJENDRA MAHARAJ (director)**

**Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj** is an Indo-Caribbean American artist, educator and activist. He is the Artistic Director of Rebel Theater. Regional directing credits: Syracuse Stage (*Godspell* and *Putting It Together*), Freedom Theatre (*Walk Through Time*, by Lynn Nottage - world premiere), Actors Theatre of Louisville (*Nightswim* and *Classyass*), St. Louis Black Rep (*Damn Yankees*), Arkansas Repertory Theatre (*Dreamgirls*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Little Rock*, *A Raisin in the Sun*), Crossroads Theatre (*History of the Word*, *The Colored Museum*), Alabama Shakespeare Festival (*Sanctified*), Prince Musical Theatre (*From the Hip*), Theatre of the Stars (*Dreamgirls the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary production* starring Tony Award® recipient Jennifer Holiday), The Goodman Theatre (*The Black Nativity*) and Portland Stage Company (*Master Harold and the Boys*).

New York directing credits: The Public Theatre (*365 Days*, *Memphis Minnie* workshop), Classical Theatre of Harlem (*Marat Sade*), Lark Play Development Center (*Man Measures Man*, *Breathe*), New Federal Theatre (*Diss Diss and Diss Dat*), Rebel Theatre (*Ghosts*, world premiere adaptation), Making Books Sing (*Band of Angels*, *Shelter in my Car*, *Chachajis Cup*), Amas Musical Theatre (*Bubbling Brown Sugar*, *Damn Yankees*, *Mamma I Want to Sing*, *Magpie*) and HERE (*The Little Playhouse*). He has held artistic residencies with The Public Theatre, Freedom Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Kennedy Center, Crossroads Theatre, Lark Play Development Center, Arkansas Repertory Theatre, and Amas Musical Theatre. He was the Assistant to the Director on the Tony Award®-winning Broadway revival of *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Maharaj is the founder and the artistic advisor of River Voices, an African American Latino playwriting festival in collaboration with Arkansas Repertory Theatre. He is also an artistic consultant for the Arkansas Repertory Theater. Maharaj is the former Associate Artistic Director of Syracuse Stage and the Lark Play Development Center. He also serves on the advisory board for Making Books Sing. Maharaj holds a BS from St. John's University and an MFA from Brooklyn College. He has served as a guest faculty member at both Syracuse School of Drama

and Carnegie Mellon School of Drama. He has been a master lecturer at the Actors Studio Drama School and Pace University.

*Sweet Tea* is produced through special arrangement with Jane M. Saks.

*Sweet Tea* was originally produced by Jane M. Saks, Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women and Gender in the Arts and Media, Columbia College Chicago and About Face Theatre.

### **SIGNATURE'S 2011-12 SEASON TICKETS**

Signature Theatre's 2011-2012 line-up features the Tony Award®-winning shows *Hairspray* and *God of Carnage* and the Washington DC premiere of the cult classic musical *Xanadu*. The season also features an unprecedented five world premiere works, including *The Hollow*, *The Boy Detective Fails* (both in repertory), *Brother Russia*, and *Really Really*. In addition to the mainstage shows, Signature presents three productions with limited engagements, including the world premiere of *A Second Chance* and *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South*. Stephen Sondheim's first musical *Saturday Night* will be a special concert event that will play for four performances only.

Single tickets now available. Discount subscription packages (starting at 3 shows) are available by calling Ticketmaster at (703) 573-SEAT (7328) or the Signature Box Office at (703) 820-9771. For more information on the 2011-12 season, please visit [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org).

### **ABOUT SIGNATURE**

Recipient of the 2009 Regional Theatre Tony Award®, Signature Theatre is a non-profit professional theater company in Arlington, Virginia dedicated to producing contemporary musicals and plays, reinventing classic musicals, and developing new work. Under the leadership of co-founder and Artistic Director Eric Schaeffer and Managing Director Maggie Boland, Signature has presented 34 world premiere productions and is renowned for combining Broadway-quality productions with intimate playing spaces.

In addition to hosting the finest talent from the DC metropolitan area and New York, Signature has been home to such theatre luminaries as Chita Rivera, George Hearn, Hunter Foster, Emily Skinner, Marc Kudisch, Judy Kuhn, John Kander and Fred Ebb, Cameron Mackintosh, Terrence McNally, and the company's signature composer, Stephen Sondheim. Since its founding in 1989, Signature has won 72 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the Washington, DC region's professional theater and has been honored with 293 nominations.

Signature is partially supported by a grant from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts and by a gift from Arlington County through the Arlington Commission for the Arts and the Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources.

### **DIRECTIONS**

Signature Theatre is located at 4200 Campbell Avenue (22206) off I-395 at the Shirlington exit. After the exit, blue Signature signs mark the way to the theatre. Free parking is available in two adjacent public garages. Please note that Campbell Avenue is a new street and some GPS online mapping systems do not yet recognize Signature Theatre's address. For directions visit <http://signature-theatre.org/map.htm>.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Subscriptions/Groups: (703) 820-9771  
Single Tickets: Ticketmaster (703) 573-SEAT (7328)  
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