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**signature**news

## Signature Theatre Announces Creative Team for Upcoming World Premiere *And The Curtain Rises* (formerly *Wheatley's Folly*)

Tony Award® nominee Kristin Hanggi directs world premiere with music  
by Joseph Thalken, book by Michael Slade, and lyrics by Mark  
Campbell

Part Three of Signature's American Musical Voices Project

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Arlington, VA, January 25, 2011 – Virginia's Tony Award®-winning **Signature Theatre** has announced the artistic team behind the upcoming world premiere of the musical comedy *And the Curtain Rises* (formerly known as *Wheatley's Folly*), which begins performances on **Thursday, March 17, 2011**. *And the Curtain Rises* marks the third production presented as part of **Signature's** groundbreaking **American Musical Voices Project**, the largest commissioning program for new musicals in the country, following Michael John LaChiusa's *Giant* in 2009 and Ricky Ian Gordon's *Sycamore Trees* last year.

Directing *And the Curtain Rises* will be Tony Award® nominee Kristin Hanggi (Broadway's *Rock of Ages*). Music was composed by **Joseph Thalken**, one of five composers to garner Signature's prestigious **Musical Theatre Composer Grant**. The book for *And the Curtain Rises* is written by **Michael Slade** with lyrics by **Mark Campbell**. Rounding out the creative team are: Music Director/Conductor **Boko Suzuki**, Choreographer **Josh Walden**, Set Designer **Beowulf Boritt**, Costume Designer **Kathleen Geldard**, Lighting Designer **Colin K. Bills**, and Sound Designer **Matt Rowe**.

**Eric Schaeffer**, Artistic Director of **Signature Theatre** stated, "Since establishing our American Musical Voices Project, Signature Theatre has been thrilled and proud to have been the birthplace of two outstanding world premiere musicals from the gifted artists Michael John LaChiusa and Ricky Ian Gordon. With **Joseph Thalken** and this incredibly talented creative team attached, *And the Curtain Rises* will no doubt continue our tradition of bringing the very best new musical works to our audience."

Inspired by true events, *And the Curtain Rises* tells the outrageous and funny story of how the first American musical was born. Set in 1866, this musical comedy follows novice producer William Wheatley as he finds his production in shambles: a dreadful script, an uncompromising author, a cast on the verge of revolt, and scenery and costumes destroyed – further complicated, when a French ballet troupe is forced to seek refuge in their theatre after a fire erupts next door. Rather than throw in the towel and count his losses, Wheatley decides to take control and turn lemons into lemonade. Composer **Joseph Thalken** says, "We like to think of this show as a love letter to the crazy business of musical theater. I'm a big history buff, and have long been intrigued by the legend of how the musical was born. It fascinates me how such a major industry was formed essentially by accident. It was serendipity."

### **PERFORMANCE DATES & TICKET INFORMATION**

Performances of *And the Curtain Rises* run from March, 17 2011 to April 10, 2011. Show times are Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:30 pm, Thursdays and Fridays at 8:00 pm, Saturdays at 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm, and Sundays at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm. There are no performances on Saturday, March 19 at 2:00pm and Tuesday, March 29 at 7:30pm.

Tickets range from \$59 - \$85 and are available by calling Ticketmaster at (703) 573-SEAT (7328) or visiting [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org). Group discounts are available for parties of ten or more by contacting **Bethany Shannon** at [shannonb@signature-theatre.org](mailto:shannonb@signature-theatre.org) or by calling (571) 527-1831. For more information please visit [www.signature-theatre.org](http://www.signature-theatre.org).

### **SPONSORSHIP**

*And the Curtain Rises* is sponsored by the Shen Family Foundation and is a recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New American Plays Award and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

### **MEDIA SPONSORSHIPS**

*WAMU Radio* and *Metro Weekly* are media sponsors for *And the Curtain Rises*.

### **LOCATION – PROXIMITY TO WASHINGTON, DC**

Located in Arlington, Virginia and complete with free parking, Signature Theatre is just 5.2 miles from the D.C.'s landmark, the Washington Monument, an estimated 10 – 15 minute drive according to [googlemaps.com](http://googlemaps.com). Using public transportation, Signature can be reached by the 7, 25 and 25A buses from Pentagon Metro Station or via a \$12 taxi ride from the Pentagon City Metro stop (on both the Blue & Yellow lines) with a taxi stand located in front of the Ritz Carlton Hotel.

### **SIGNATURE'S 2010-11 SEASON TICKETS**

The remaining shows in Signature's 2010-11 season include Yasmina Reza's Tony Award-winning play *Art* and *Side by Side by Sondheim*. Tickets are available by calling Signature's Box Office at (703) 820-9771.

### **AND THE CURTAIN RISES**

**Book by Michael Slade**

**Music by Joseph Thalken**

**Lyrics by Mark Campbell**

**March 17, 2011 – April 10, 2011**

**The MAX**

## Artistic Team Bios

### **JOSEPH THALKEN (Composer/Orchestrations)**

is an award-winning composer whose latest musical, *And the Curtain Rises* (with book by Michael Slade and lyrics by Mark Campbell), is based on a true story about the birth of the first American musical. Thalken gained notoriety in 2003 when he became the first (and, to this date, the only) composer to ever have two musicals showcased the same year at the prestigious National Alliance for Musical Theatre (NAMT) Festival in New York. The two shows were *Harold & Maude*, book/lyrics by *Fantasticks* co-creator Tom Jones (later produced at the Paper Mill Playhouse, Millburn, NJ; TheatreWorks, Palo Alto; Human Race Theatre Company, Dayton; and other theaters from Cleveland to Tokyo); and *Was*, book/lyrics by Barry Kleinbort, based on Geoff Ryman's novel (workshopped at Lincoln Center Theatre, NYC; produced at Human Race Theatre Company, Dayton; and Northwestern University's American Music Theatre Project). Thalken has also written choral, concert and chamber music works, including *Tales of Music and Magic* (Skaneateles Festival); and contributed to Mark Campbell's *Songs from an Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop). His music and orchestrations can be heard on albums by Rebecca Luker, Howard McGillin, BJ Ward, opera star Nathan Gunn, and DC's Sally Martin, among others. On Broadway, Thalken conducted *Victor/Victoria* with Julie Andrews and Liza Minnelli, and *Gypsy* with Patti LuPone. He's also conducted the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra; New Jersey Symphony Orchestra; Aachen Stadttheater (Germany); and International Opera Studio (Zurich). As a pianist and musical director, he has toured extensively with LuPone, and worked with Bernadette Peters, Barry Manilow, Polly Bergen, Kristin Chenoweth and many more. Previous honors include two Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla Foundation Musical Theater Commendations, the Constance Klinsky Award, Meet the Composer award, and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. He is a proud graduate of Northwestern University.

### **MICHAEL SLADE (Book)**

Michael Slade is a playwright, librettist, children's author and television writer. His play, *And a Child Shall Lead*, about child prisoners in the Terezin concentration camp recently finished a successful two-month run at Chicago's Vittum Theatre where it was called "awe-inspiring theatre" by the *Chicago Sun Times*. Before that, his play *Under a Red Moon* was produced as a reading by NY's Roundabout Theatre in NYC, starring Kate Burton and Billy Crudup. His last musical, *Bye, Bye Big Guy* (music by David Evans and lyrics by Faye Greenberg), premiered at the Lucille Lortel Theatre as part of the 2007 NYC International Fringe Festival. Mr. Slade has written extensively for young people. He contributed the books to ten musicals produced by Theatreworks/USA, and wrote *Pokemon Live!* which opened at Radio City Music Hall prior to national and international tours. His first children's novel, *The Horses of Central Park* (Scholastic Hardcover/Apple Paperback) received the ISAR award for children's literature. Mr. Slade was nominated for an Emmy as a writer of ABC's *One Life to Live*, and for a Writers' Guild Award for NBC's *Another World*. He has also written for NBC's *Passions* and *Days of Our Lives*.

### **MARK CAMPBELL (Lyricist)**

has 2 other premieres in Virginia this month besides *And the Curtain Rises: The Inspector*, a full-length comic opera at Wolf Trap Opera, for which he wrote the libretto (music by John Musto), and *Rappahannock County*, a music theatre work about life during the Civil War, at Virginia Opera, for which he created the concept and wrote the lyrics (music by Ricky Ian Gordon). Mark is most familiar to DC-area audiences for having written the librettos for *Volpone* (Wolf Trap Opera) and *Later the Same Evening*

at the National Gallery of Art and the University of Maryland. Other works include *Songs From an Unmade Bed* (New York Theatre Workshop) and *Bastianello/Lucrezia* (New York Festival of Song). Awards: First recipient of the Kleban Award for Lyricist, two Richard Rodgers Awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a New York Foundation for the Arts Playwriting Fellowship, 3 Drama Desk Award nominations, a Rockefeller Foundation Award, a Jonathan Larson Foundation Award and a Grammy nomination. Upcoming premieres include Minnesota Opera's production of *Silent Night* (music by Kevin Puts) in November. Mark was born in DC and spent his childhood in Silver Spring and Severna Park.

#### **KRISTIN HANGGI (Director)**

Kristin was nominated for a 2009 Tony for Best Direction of a musical for *Rock of Ages*. She helmed the Toronto, Off-Broadway, Australia, and National Tour. She directed the LA and NY productions of the hit musical *Bare* (Ovation, L.A. Weekly Award); *Pussycat Dolls Live At The Roxy* with Gwen Stefani, Christina Aguilera and Charlize Theron. Some theater credits include: *Catch the Fish* (NY Fringe Best Play) and the LA Premiere of *Corpus Christi* (Ticketholder Award). As a film director, Hanggi is preparing *Dear Dumb Diary* for Zucker Productions with *Modern Family*'s Ariel Winter, *Naomi + Ely's No Kiss List* with Hayden Panettiere, and *Shopping For Boys* for Paramount with Mena Suvari and Amy Smart. M.A. from USC and B.A. from UCLA.

#### **JOSH WALDEN (Choreographer)**

has choreographed for The Kennedy Center, Sacramento Music Circus, DR2 Theatre, Bay Street Theatre, The New York International Fringe Festival, Theatreworks USA, Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Gateway Playhouse, Riverside Theatre in FL, D.A.R.E., Tisch School of the Arts, Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, Shenandoah Summer Music Theatre and Morag Productions for the Seabourn Sun Cruise Ship. He was recently the Associate Director/Choreographer for the Broadway Revival of *Ragtime*. Walden's dance company, Walden Dance Theatre, had its first dance musical, *All Is Love*, produced at the 2006 New York Musical Theatre Festival receiving an honorable mention for Direction/Choreography. As a performer, he has been in the Broadway Revivals of *42nd Street*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *A Chorus Line* and *Ragtime*.

#### **BEOWULF BORITT (Set Designer)**

Broadway: *The Scottsboro Boys*, *Rock of Ages*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, ...*Spelling Bee*, *Lovemusik*, *The Two and Only*. Off- Broadway: More than 50 shows including: *The Last Five Years*, *Toxic Avenger*, *Miss Julie*, Public, Roundabout, MTC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage, MCC, New Group, Pearl, American Place, Keen Company. Other Designs: *Paradise Found* (London), *Reel to Real* (Beijing, Edinburgh) and 2 editions of the Ringling Brothers Circus.

#### **BOKO SUZUKI (Music Director/Conductor)**

Boko conducted the San Francisco production of the hit musical *Wicked* after having music directed the 1st National Tour. He recently conducted and co-arranged the new Off Broadway musical *The Kid* and spent three years music directing *Rent* on Broadway after having music directed both national tours, as well as supervising the Australian production. Boko also music directed the national tour of *Swing!*, for which he was nominated for an L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Award, and the first national tour of *Mamma Mia!* Other credits include *Cats*, *Les Miserables*, *The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*, *The Who's Tommy* and *Sunset Boulevard*, as well as appearing as guest conductor with the Toronto Symphony.

#### **KATHLEEN GELDARD (Costume Design)**

**SIGNATURE:** *Sunset Boulevard, Walter Cronkite is Dead.* (world premiere), *A Fox on the Fairway* (world premiere), *Chess, Sycamore Trees* (world premiere), *Sweeney Todd, I Am My Own Wife, Show Boat, See What I Wanna See, Les Misérables, The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Happy Time.* **DC AREA:** Woolly Mammoth Theatre: *Eclipsed*; Round House Theatre: *Permanent Collection, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Eurydice, Orson's Shadow, Life x 3*; Imagination Stage: *The Neverending Story* (2008 Helen Hayes nomination), *Twice Upon a Time, The Hundred Dresses*; Studio-Arena Theatre: *Batboy*; Olney: *Da, Is He Dead?, Rabbit Hole, Of Mice and Men, Elephant Man, Having Our Say*; Folger Theatre: *Comedy of Errors, All's Well that Ends Well*; Studio Theatre Secondstage; Everyman Theatre; Vineyard Playhouse; Theater J; Rep Stage. **DANCE:** Liz Lerman Dance Exchange: *Nocturnes, The Farthest Earth From Thee, 613 Radical Acts of Prayer, Funny Uncles, Imprints on a Landscape: The Mining Project.*

### **COLIN K. BILLS (Lighting Design)**

**SIGNATURE:** *Fox on the Fairway, I Am My Own Wife.* **DC AREA:** Woolly Mammoth Theatre (Associate Artist): *Oedipus el Rey, House of Gold, The Vibrator Play, Clybourne Park, Gruesome Playground Injuries, Fever/Dream, Dead Man's Cell Phone*; Round House Theatre: *Eurydice, The Book Club Play*; Studio Theatre: *Circle Mirror Transformation, Radio Golf*; Didactic Theatre, Forum Theatre, Imagination Stage, The Kennedy Center, Maryland Stage, MetroStage, Olney Theatre, The Smithsonian Institution, Synetic Theatre, Theatre for the First Amendment, Theatre J, Tsunami Theatre, The Washington Revels. **REGIONAL:** The Berkshire Theater Festival: *Best Kept Secret*; **CENTERSTAGE:** *Working it Out*; Contemporary American Theater Festival: *Breadcrumbs, Lidless, The History of Light, 50 Words, Lonesome Hollow, My Name is Rachel Corrie*; Intiman Theatre: *All the King's Men*; The Williamstown Theatre Festival: *The Physicists.* **AWARDS:** 2010 and 2008 Helen Hayes Awards, 2009 Princess Grace Theater Fellowship. **EDUCATION:** Dartmouth.

### **MATT ROWE (Sound Design)**

**SIGNATURE:** *Sunset Boulevard, Walter Cronkite is Dead., A Fox on the Fairway, Chess, Sycamore Trees, [title of show], Sweeney Todd, Show Boat, First You Dream: The Music of Kander & Ebb, Dirty Blonde, Giant, The Little Dog Laughed, Les Misérables, Anyone Can Whistle in Concert, The Visit, The Happy Time, Kiss of the Spider Woman, Glory Days, Merrily We Roll Along, The Witches of Eastwick.* **DC AREA:** Kennedy Center: *Snow White, Rose Red, and Fred, Nobody's Perfect.*

### **About the American Musical Voices Project (AMVP)**

Signature Theatre's **American Musical Voices Project** is the largest single musical theater commissioning and producing initiative of any U.S. theater. Founded in May 2006 and funded by **The Shen Family Foundation**, the AMVP demonstrates Signature's commitment to producing full productions of world premiere musical theatre works. Through the AMVP, **Musical Theater Composer Grants** have been awarded to **Ricky Ian Gordon, Michael John LaChiusa, Joseph Thalken, Adam Guettel** and **Jeanine Tesori**. Each of the grants includes a commission to create a new full-length musical, with a commitment for full production as part of Signature Theatre's mainstage season. In April 2009, *Giant* by Michael John LaChiusa received its world premiere at Signature Theatre. Ricky Ian Gordon's *Sycamore Trees* premiered in May 2010, and Joseph Thalken's musical, *And the Curtain Rises* (formerly known as *Wheatley's Folly*) premieres in March 2011.

As part of the AMVP, **Musical Theater Leadership Awards** have been made to four individuals in recognition of their extraordinary influence on and contribution to the advancement of new musical theater, orchestrator Bruce Coughlin, composer Adam

Guettel, singer/actress Audra McDonald, and director/musical director/orchestrator Ted Sperling.

In June 2008, the AMVP added **The Next Generation** program. That year, emerging composers Matt Conner, Adam Gwon, & Gabriel Kahane each received a commission to write new musicals for Signature Theatre and honorees Peter Foley and Marisa Michelson were given grants for the development of their musical ideas. In July 2009, the Theatre launched “21/24 Signature Lab,” three weeks of rehearsal & performances of new works by **The Next Generation** composers. Also announced as part of The Next Generation segment of the AMVP were two additional musical commissions awarded to Peter Foley and Marisa Michelson, as well as honoree grants given to Chris Miller and Scott Davenport Richards for the development of future musical ideas. In 2010, Miller and Richards were awarded commissions through **The Next Generation** program, and Joshua Schmidt and Joshua Rosenblum were named honorees.

### **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 31 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 70 Helen Hayes Awards for excellence in the Washington, DC region’s professional theater and has been honored with 276 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**

The 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: (703) 820-9771

Single Tickets: Ticketmaster (703) 573-SEAT (7328)

Signature Administration (571) 527-1860

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